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AUTHOR Mullin, James
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ABSTRACT

Between 1845 and 1850, more than a million Irish starved to death while massive quantities of food were being exported from their country. A half million were evicted from their homes during the potato blight. A million and a half emigrated to the United States, Britain, and Australia, often on board rotting, overcrowded "coffin ships." This is the story of how that immense tragedy came to pass. The necessary historical and political context for a study of the Irish Famine is provided in the teacher's synopsis. Following the synopsis is a student summary that provides an historical overview and concludes with seven questions. Six lessons follow the student summary: (1) Laws; (2) Racism; (3) Eviction; (4) Mortality; (5) Emigration; and (6) Genocide. A synopsis gives an overview of the relevant Irish and English history and contains 47 footnotes and a 15-item bibliography. Each unit of study begins with a list of performance objectives, teaching/learning strategies and activities, and instructional materials/resources. (Contains 75 additional footnotes.) (BT)

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The Great Irish Famine

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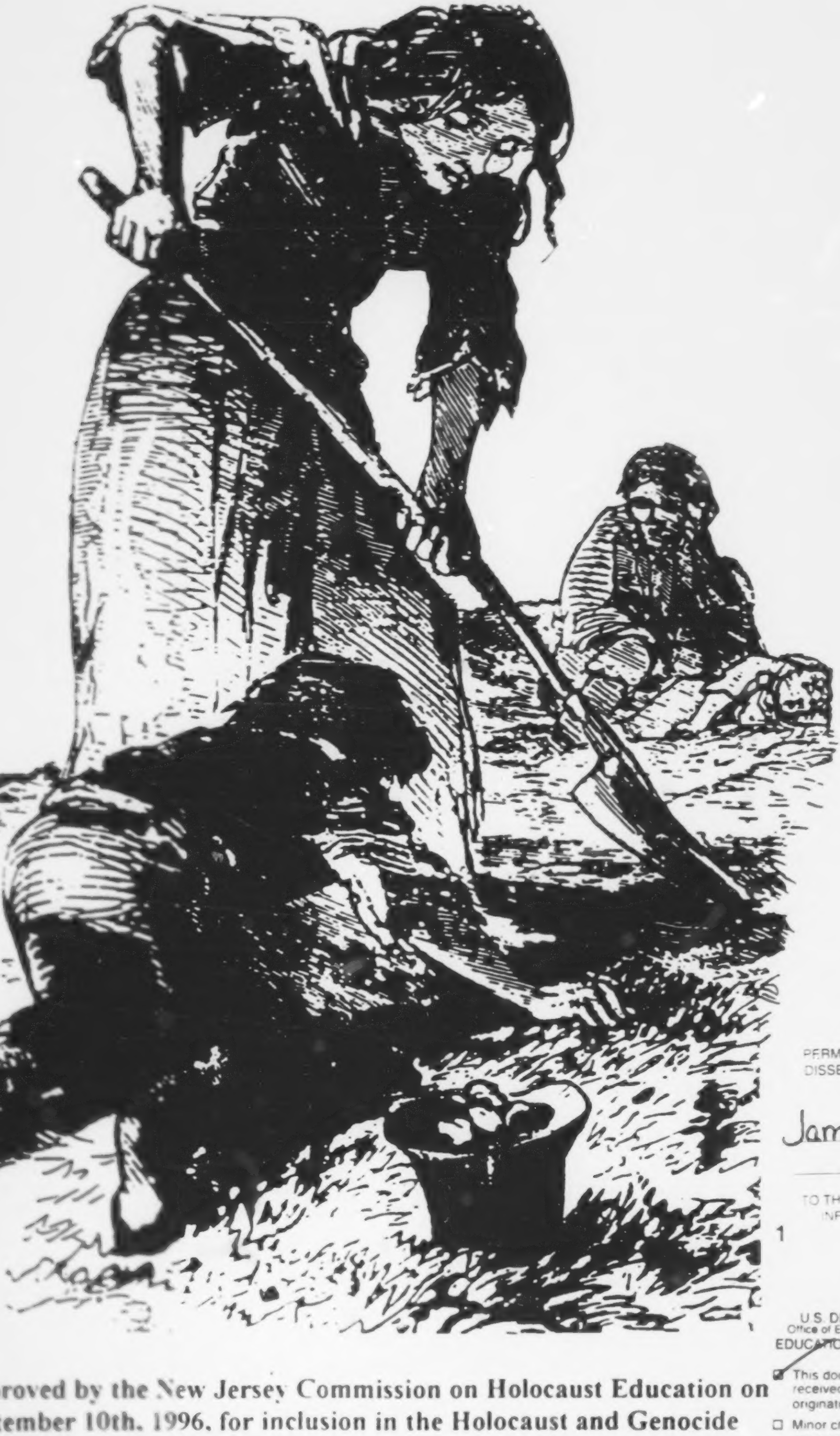

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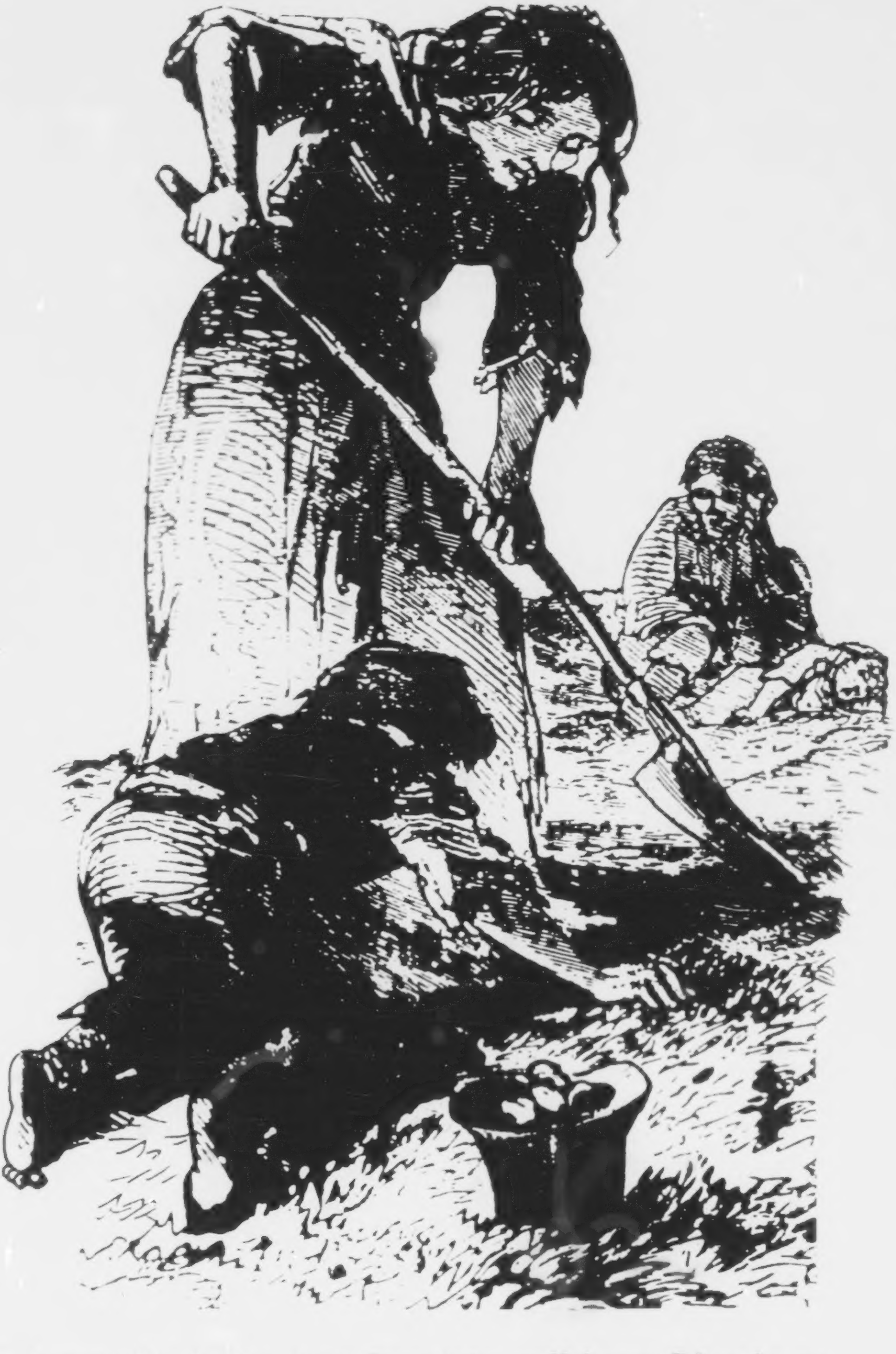

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DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This curriculum is dedicated to the millions of Irish who suffered and perished in the Great Starvation. It is also dedicated to those who escaped by emigration, and to the great Irish Diaspora worldwide.

The Irish Famine Curriculum would not have been possible without the work of New Jersey Senator James E. McGreevey, Rutgers Economics Professor Jack Worrall, historian Dr. Christine Kinealy, teacher Jim Masker, and author Liz Curtis.

We express our gratitude to Eoin McKiernan, Fr. Des Wilson, the late Dennis Clark, and the late Michael J. Kane, who have shown us their Faith by their Works.

"Truth flourishes where the student's lamp has shown, and there alone..."

- W.B. Yeats, 1921

TEACHER'S INTRODUCTION

Between 1845 and 1850, more than a million Irish people starved to death while massive quantities of food were being exported from their country. A half million were evicted from their homes during the potato blight, and a million and a half emigrated to America, Britain and Australia, often on-board rotting, overcrowded "coffin ships". This is the story of how that immense tragedy came to pass.

The necessary historical and political context for a study of the Irish Famine is provided to you in the Teacher and Student Summary, immediately following the Table of Contents.

It would be very difficult for the student to understand any of the six study units that follow without first reading the Summary. If time constraints only permit the study of one or two sections of this curriculum, the Summary should be used first. Thank you for all your efforts to make this history come alive.

Prepared by the Irish Famine Curriculum Committee, James Mullin, Chairman: 757 Paddock Path, Moorestown, NJ 08057 (609)727-4255, FAX: (609)866-9538, email: JVMullin@aol.com

ABOUT THE CONTENTS

These units follow the Teacher and Student Summary (pp.3-18):

I. LAWS THAT ISOLATED AND IMPOVERISHED THE IRISH: This section shows how the Penal Laws, and the Statutes of Kilkenny, reduced the Irish to the status of disenfranchised non-persons in their own country, and it examines how "laissez faire" and repression of trade laws laid the groundwork for the Famine to take place. (pp.19-32)

II. RACISM: This section provides numerous examples and cartoon illustrations showing how the Irish, as well as Africans and others, were made into racist stereotypes. (pp.33-60)

III. MASS EVICTION DURING FAMINE: This sections shows the extent to which eviction was employed during the Famine, the reasons why it was employed, and its devastating consequences for the suffering people. (pp.61-69)

IV. MORTALITY RATES AND "THE HORROR": This sections shows death rates in relation to Ireland's population at the time of the Famine, and gives personal accounts of Famine scenes to help put a human face on the tragedy. (pp.70-79)

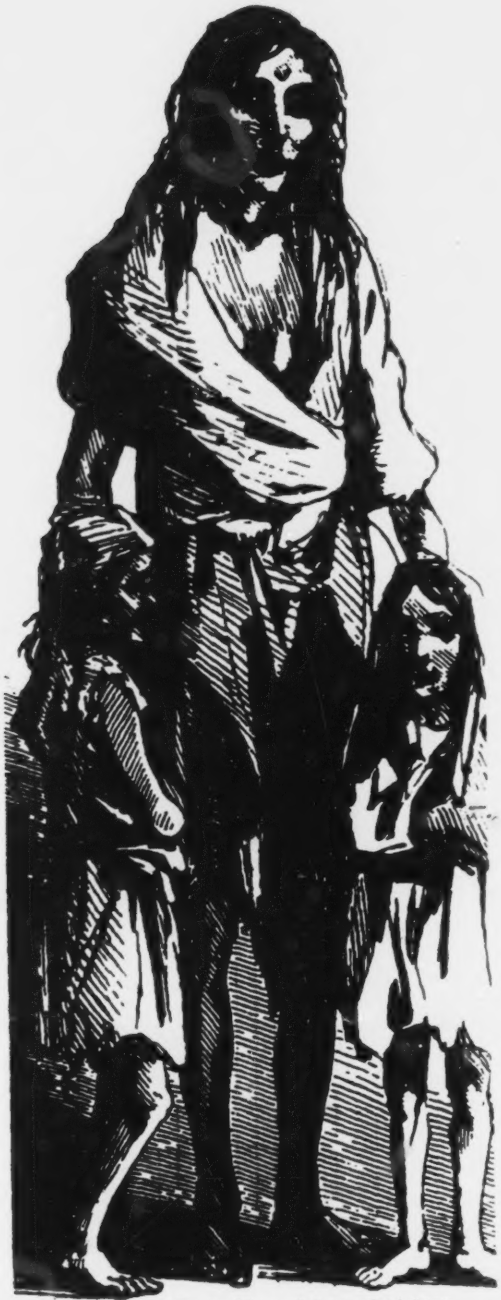
V. EMIGRATION: DEPARTURE, CROSSING, AND ARRIVAL: This section describes the conditions faced by the famine-stricken people at disembarkation centers, on board "coffin ships" and at quarantine stations. (pp. 80-95)

VI. GENOCIDE: This section gathers together several definitions of genocide, as well as statements made by historical figures and historians, and asks the students to relate facts, opinions and definitions. (pp. 96-105)

VII. POETRY: This section features a selection of poetry inspired by the mass starvation in Ireland. (pp. 106-116)

The Great Irish Famine

Teacher and Student Summary



Bridget O'Donnell and her children

EARLY IRELAND

Human habitation in Ireland dates from the mesolithic (middle stone age) period, approximately 7,000 years B.C. The people are assumed to have been hunter-gatherers and fishermen. They showed great reverence for the dead, and left behind stone tombs like Newgrange, outside Dublin. About 3,500 years B.C., in the neolithic, or late stone age, Irish farmers cleared land, used stone tools, planted crops and kept sheep and cattle. (1.)

THE CELTS

The Celts began arriving from Europe as early as the 6th century B.C. They brought with them the iron-age culture. Celtic Ireland was divided into 150 little kingdoms, and five provinces, four surviving to today: Ulster, Munster, Leinster & Connacht. The extended family was the social unit and there were no towns. The Irish Celts spoke the Irish language, believed in druidism, and obeyed the laws interpreted by early lawyers called brehons. (2.)

ST. PATRICK & CHRISTIANITY

In the 5th century A.D. Irish pirates raided Britain and captured a 16 year-old Roman citizen named Patrick. He was kept as a slave in Ireland, and worked as a shepherd. He eventually escaped and returned home. When he was studying in Gaul (now France) he had recurring dreams in which the children of Ireland appeared to him, asking him to return. He came back to Ireland as a missionary, and by the time he died in 465 all of Ireland was Christian.

St. Patrick is also credited with bringing the Latin alphabet to Ireland, and founding a great many monasteries. By the 8th century the Irish monks had made great technical advances in the craft of making illuminated manuscripts. The best example is the Book of Kells, an 8th century copy of the New Testament.

THE VIKINGS

The monks also worked elaborate ornamentation in bronze, enamel and gold. (3.) Rumors of these treasures brought on invasions by fleets of long boats carrying Danish Vikings. They deployed fortified settlements and built towns. In the year 841 they founded Dublin. (Dubh Linn meaning Black Pool)

THE NORMANS

The first Normans from England and Wales landed in Wexford, Ireland in 1169. They conquered the disunited Irish using armor, horses and fortified castles. The Normans brought with them the tradition of Common Law, based upon the personal ownership of property, in contrast with life under Irish Brehon Law where ownership was vested in the extended family or clan. However, the newcomers quickly adopted the Irish language, married into Irish families, and "it was said of them that they became more Irish than the Irish themselves." (4.)

STATUTES OF KILKENNY

The English crown wished to preserve the racial purity and cultural separateness of the colonizers. They instituted the Statutes of Kilkenny. These decreed that the two races, Norman and Gaelic (Irish) should remain separate. Marriage between races was made a capital offense. The statutes explained:

"Whereas at the conquest of the land of Ireland and for a long time after, the English of the said land used the English language...Now many English of the said land, forsaking the English language, fashion, mode of riding, laws and usages, live and govern themselves according to the manners, fashion and language of the Irish enemies..." (5.)

The government responsible for the statutes was in control only in the area around Dublin, known as the English Pale. The effort to prevent assimilation to Irish ways led to the expression, "Beyond the Pale."

THE REFORMATION

In the 1530s England's King Henry began the process of breaking with the Catholic Church of Rome. This split led to the eventual foundation of the Church of England. The Reformation divided the Irish, who remained Catholic, from the English, who became Protestants. In 1601, at the battle of Kinsale, the Irish armies and their Spanish allies were defeated. For the first time all Ireland was governed by a strong English central administration based in Dublin.

THE PLANTATION

Another English policy to subdue Ireland was the colonization of Ulster with new settlers, mostly Scottish Presbyterians and English Protestants. This system of colonization was known as "a planting". The native Irish were driven off almost 500,000 acres of the best land in counties Tyrone, Donegal, Derry, Armagh and Cavan. The property was then consolidated and colonizers were 'planted' on large estates. (6.)

OLIVER CROMWELL

In 1641 the Irish rebelled against the English and Scottish who possessed their land, and were immediately caught up in the English civil war between Parliament and king. In 1649 Oliver Cromwell landed at Dublin with an army of 12,000 men. He was joined by the 8,000 strong parliamentary army. He successfully laid seige to the town of Drogheda, and on his orders the 2,699 men of the royalist garrison were put to death. Townspeople were also slaughtered. Cromwell reported that "We put to the sword the whole number of inhabitants. I do not think thirty of the whole number escaped with their lives." (7.)

Large-scale confiscation of land followed. The owners were driven off eleven million acres of land and it was given to the Protestant colonists. "Irish landowners found east of the river Shannon after 1 May, 1654 faced the death penalty or slavery in the West Indies and Barbados." (8.) The expression "To hell or Connaught" originated at this time:

"those who did not leave their fertile fields and travel to the poor land west of the Shannon would be put to the sword." (9.)

PENAL LAWS

In the 1690s the Penal Laws, designed to repress the native Irish were introduced. The first ordered that no Catholic could have a gun, pistol, or sword. Over the next 30 years the other Penal laws followed: Irish Catholics were forbidden to receive an education, enter a profession, vote, hold public office, practice their religion, attend Catholic worship, engage in trade or commerce, purchase land, lease land, receive a gift of land or inherit land from a Protestant, rent land worth more than thirty shillings a year, own a horse of greater value than five pounds, be the guardian to a child, educate their own children or send a child abroad to receive an education.

Edmund Burke, an Irish-born Protestant who became a British Member of Parliament, (MP) described the Penal laws as "well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man." (11.) The Lord Chancellor was able to say, "The law does not suppose any such person to exist as an Irish Roman Catholic."

JONATHAN SWIFT

The eighteenth century in Ireland was a dismal time for the "untrustworthy majority." The Penal Laws, directed at their education, religion, and property rights, kept them poor and powerless. One who commented on their plight was Jonathan Swift, the author of Gulliver's Travels, and Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin.

In "A Short View of the Present State of Ireland" he singled out the practice of absentee landlordism, estimating that half the net revenues of Ireland were taken out of the country and spent in Britain. Ever increasing rent, the source of most revenue, Swift declared, "is squeezed out of the very blood, and vitals, and clothes, and dwellings of the tenants, who live worse than English beggars. The families of farmers who pay great rents [are] living in filth and nastiness upon buttermilk and potatoes, without a shoe or a stocking to their feet, or a house so convenient as an English hog sty to receive them. These may, indeed, be comfortable sights to an English spectator who comes for a short time to learn the language, and returns back to his own country, whither he finds all our wealth transmitted." (12.)

BERKELEY THE PHILOSOPHER

A contemporary and friend of Swift's, philosopher George Berkeley, wrote in a 1736 journal wondering "whether a foreigner could imagine that half of the people were starving in a country which sent out such plenty of provisions". Berkeley had been to Rhode Island and seen Negro slavery on American plantations. Berkeley wrote, "The Negroes have a saying, 'If Negro was not a Negro, Irishman would be Negro."' Berkeley added that the American Indians "are better clad and better lodged than the Irish cottagers." (13.)

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Act of Union, passed in 1800, abolished the independent Irish Parliament in Dublin, and brought Irish Administration under the British Parliament. Irish Protestants only were allowed to be British MPs. In 1829, after a long struggle, Irish Catholics achieved emancipation, and won the right to sit in British Parliament. However, "The bulk of the population lived in conditions of poverty and insecurity." (14)

THE ASCENDANCY

At the top of the social pyramid was the Ascendancy class, the English and Anglo-Irish families who owned most of the land, and had almost limitless power over their tenants. Some of their estates were huge - the Earl of Lucan, for example, owned over 60,000 acres. Many of these landlords lived in England and were called "absentees". They used agents called "middlemen" to administer their property, and many of them had no interest in it except to spend the money the rents brought in.

FARMERS AND COTTIERS

It was a very unbalanced social structure. The farmers rented the land they worked, and those who could afford to rent large farms would break up some of the land into smaller plots. These were leased to "cottiers" or small farmers, under a system called "conacre." Nobody had security or tenure and rents were high. Very little cash was used in the economy. The cottier paid his rent by working for his landlord, and he could rear a pig to sell for the small amount of cash he might need to buy clothes or other necessary goods.

There was also a large population of agricultural laborers who traveled around looking for work. They were very badly off because not many Irish farmers could afford to hire them. "In 1835, an inquiry found that over two million people were without regular employment of any kind." (15.) Under the Irish Poor Law of 1838, workhouses were built in all parts of the country and financed by local taxpayers.

POTATO BLIGHT

This rickety system held together only because the rural peasants had a cheap and plentiful source of food. The potato, introduced to Ireland about 1590, could grow in the poorest conditions, with very little labor. This was important because laborers had to give most of their time to the farmers they worked for, and had very little time for their own crops.

"The actual cause of (potato crop) failure was phytophthora infestans - potato blight. The spores of the blight were carried by wind, rain and insects and came to Ireland from Britain and the European continent. A fungus affected the potato plants, producing black spots and a white mould on the leaves, soon rotting the potato into a pulp." (16.)

By the summer of 1847, over three million people were being fed by government soup kitchens and those organized by Quakers. "So many people died in so short of time that mass graves were provided. (17.)

LAISSEZ-FAIRE

The dominant economic theory in mid-nineteenth century Britain was laissez-faire (meaning: 'let be'), which held that it was not a government's job to provide aid for its citizens, or to interfere with the free market of goods or trade. (18.)

Despite laissez-faire, the initial response to the Famine under British Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel, was "prompt, efficient and interventionist." (19.) He sent over a Scientific Commission to examine the facts. The commissioners reported that one-half of the crop was now destroyed, or unfit for use, but they incorrectly diagnosed the cause of the blight.

THE CORN LAWS

Food prices in Ireland were beginning to rise, and potato prices had doubled by December, 1845. Meanwhile, the Irish grain crop was being exported to Britain. (20.) Public meetings were held, and prominent citizens called for the exports to be stopped and for grain to be imported as well. However, this would have meant repealing the Corn Laws, and there was great opposition in Britain to this. (21.)

"The Corn Laws, an exception to the doctrine of laissez-faire, laid down that large taxes had to be paid on any foreign crops brought into Britain. This kept grain prices high, and the British traders would lose profits if the laws were repealed" (22.) Since the Act of Union made Ireland legally a part of the United Kingdom, its corn crop could be moved to England without incurring the tax. However, corn crops brought into Ireland to relieve the famine could be taxed.

Prime Minister Peel pushed through a repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. This split the Tory Party and Peel was forced to resign. In a powerful speech to Parliament he said, "Good God, are you to sit in cabinet and consider and calculate how much diarrhea, and bloody flux, and dysentery a people can bear before it becomes necessary for you to provide them with food?" (23.)

LORD JOHN RUSSELL

Peel was succeeded at Prime Minister by Lord John Russell, a rigid exponent of laissez-faire. In October, 1846, as it became clear that over ninety per cent of the potato crop of Ireland was blighted, Lord Russell set out his approach to the famine: "It must be thoroughly understood that we cannot feed the people...We can at best keep down prices where there is no regular market and prevent established dealers from raising prices much beyond the fair price with ordinary profits." (24.)

Russell's policies emphasized employment rather than food for famine victims, in the belief that private enterprise, not government, should be responsible for food provision. He also stressed that the cost of Irish relief work should be paid for by Irishmen. Peel's Relief Commission was abolished and relief work was put in the hands of 12,000 civil servants in the Board of Works who only found work for 750,000 of the starving people. In return for hard (and often pointless) work, starving peasants were paid starvation wages.

Tens of thousands of people died during the winter of 1846, but "Russell and his colleagues never conceived of interfering with the structure of the Irish economy in the ways that would have been necessary to prevent the worst effects of the famine."(25.)

PRIVATE RELIEF EFFORTS

The Society of Friends, or Quakers, first became involved with the Irish Famine in November, 1846, when some Dublin-based members formed a Central Relief Committee. They intended that their assistance supplement other relief. However, the relief provided by the Quakers proved crucial in keeping people alive when other relief systems failed. A number of Quakers were critical of government relief policies, holding them to be inadequate and misjudged.

The Quakers donated food, mostly American flour, rice, biscuits, and Indian meal along with clothes and bedding. They set up soup kitchens, purchased seed, and provided funds for local employment. During 1846-1847, the Quakers gave approximately 200,000 Pounds for relief in Ireland. (26.)

The British Relief Association was founded in 1847, and raised money in England, America and Australia. They benefited from a "Queen's Letter" from Victoria appealing for money to relieve the distress in Ireland. The total raised was 171,533 Pounds. A second "Queen's Letter" in October of 1847, reflected a hardening in British public opinion, as it raised hardly any additional funds. In total, the British Relief Association raised approximately 470,000 Pounds.

In August, 1847, when the Association had a balance of 200,000 Pounds, their agent in Ireland, Polish Count Strzelecki, proposed that the money be spent to help schoolchildren in the west of Ireland. The British Treasury Secretary, Charles Edward Trevelyan warned against it, fearing "it might produce the impression that the lavish charitable system of last season was intended to be renewed." (27.) Strzelecki proved adamant and Treyelan conceded that a small portion of the funds could be used for that purpose.

Donations for the Irish Famine came from distant and unexpected sources. Calcutta, India sent 16,500 Pounds in 1847, Bombay another 3,000. Florence, Italy, Antigua, France, Jamaica, and Barbados sent contributions. The Choctaw tribe in North America sent $710. Many major cities in America set up Relief Committees for Ireland, and Jewish synagogues in America and Britain contributed generously.

EXPORTS

In Ireland Before and After the Famine, author Cormac O' Gra'da documents that in 1845, a famine year in Ireland, 3,251,907 quarters (8 bushels = 1 quarter)) of corn were exported from Ireland to Britain. That same year, 257,257 sheep were exported to Britain. In 1846, another famine year, 480,827 swine, and 186,483 oxen were exported to Britain. (28.)

Cecil Woodham-Smith, considered the preeminent authority on the Irish Famine, wrote in The Great Hunger; Ireland 1845-1849 that, "...no issue has provoked so much anger or so embittered relations between the two countries (England and Ireland) as the indisputable fact that huge quantities of food were exported from Ireland to England throughout the period when the people of Ireland were dying of starvation."(29.)

"Although the potato crop failed, the country was still producing and exporting more than enough grain crops to feed the population. But that was a 'money crop' and not a 'food crop' and could not be interfered with." (30.)

According to John Mitchel, quoted by Woodham-Smith, "Ireland was actually producing sufficient food, wool and flax, to feed and clothe not nine but eighteen millions of people," yet a ship sailing into an Irish port during the famine years with a cargo of grain was "sure to meet six ships sailing out with a similar cargo."

One of the most remarkable facts about the famine period is that there was an average monthly export of food from Ireland worth 100,000 Pound Sterling. Almost throughout the five-year famine, Ireland remained a net exporter of food. (31.)

Dr. Christine Kinealy, a fellow at the University of Liverpool and the author of two scholarly texts on the Irish Famine: This Great Calamity and A Death-Dealing Famine, says that 9,992 calves were exported from Ireland to England during "Black'47", an increase of thirty-three percent from the previous year. In the twelve months following the second failure of the potato crop, 4,000 horses and ponies were exported. The export of livestock to Britain (with the exception of pigs) increased during the "famine". The export of bacon and ham increased. In total, over three million live animals were exported from Ireland between 1846-50, more than the number of people who emigrated during the famine years.

Dr. Kinealy's most recent work is documented in the spring, 1998 issue of "History Ireland". She states that almost 4,000 vessels carried food from Ireland to the ports of Bristol, Glasgow, Liverpool and London during 1847, when 400,000 Irish men, women and children died of starvation and related diseases. The food was shipped under guard from the most famine-stricken parts of Ireland: Ballina, Ballyshannon, Bantry, Dingle, Killala, Kilrush, Limerick, Sligo, Tralee and Westport.

During the first nine months of "Black '47" the export of grain-derived alcohol from Ireland to England included the following: 874,170 gallons of porter, 278,658 gallons of Guinness, and 183,392 gallons of whiskey. The total amount of grain-derived alcohol exported from Ireland in just nine months of Black'47 is 1,336,220 gallons!

A wide variety of commodities left Ireland during 1847, including peas, beans, onions, rabbits, salmon, oysters, herring, lard, honey, tongues, animal skins, rags, shoes, soap, glue and seed.

The most shocking export figures concern butter. Butter was shipped in firkins, each one holding nine gallons. In the first nine months of 1847, 56,557 firkins were exported from Ireland to Bristol, and 34,852 firkins were shipped to Liverpool. That works out to be 822,681 gallons of butter exported to England from Ireland during nine months of the worst year of "famine".

If the other three months of exports were at all comparable, then we can safely assume that a million gallons of butter left Ireland while 400,000 Irish people starved to death!

Dr. Kinealy's research proves beyond a reasonable doubt that there was sufficient food in Ireland to prevent mass starvation, and that the food was brought through the worst famine-stricken areas on its way to England. British regiments guarded the ports and warehouses in Ireland to guarantee absentee landlords and commodity speculators their "free market" profits.

When Ireland experienced an earlier famine in 1782-83, ports were closed in order to keep home grown food for domestic consumption. Food prices were immediately reduced within Ireland. The merchants lobbied against such efforts, but their protests were over-ridden. Everyone recognized that the interests of the merchants and the distressed people were irreconcilable. In the Great Famine, that recognition was disregarded.

EVICTIONS

During the worst months of the famine, in the winter of 1846-47, tens of thousands of tenants fell in arrears of rent and were evicted from their homes. "A nationwide system of ousting the peasantry began to set in, with absentee landlords, and some resident landlords as well, more determined than ever to rid Ireland of its 'surplus' Irish." (32.)

With potato cultivation over because of the blight, tenants could pay no rents. Sheep and cattle could pay rent, so landlords decided to give the land over to them. "In 1850, over 104,000 people were evicted." (33.)

MORTALITY

In 1841 the population of Ireland was given as 8,175,124. "It is almost certain that, owing to geographical difficulties and the unwillingness of the people to be registered, the census of 1841 gave a total smaller than the population in fact was. Officers engaged in relief work put the population as much as 25 per cent higher; land lords distributing relief were horrified when providing, as they imagined, food for 60 persons, to find more than 400." By 1851, after the famine, the population had dropped to 6,552,385. "The census commissioners calculated that, at the normal rate of increase, the total should have been 9,018,799 so the loss of at least 2.5 million persons had taken place." (34.)

TREVELYAN

Charles Edward Trevelyan, the British Treasury Secretary in charge, was the civil servant most involved in Irish famine relief (35.) He firmly believed in the economic principles of laissez-faire, or noninterference by the government. Trevelyan opposed expenditure and raising taxes, advocating self-sufficiency. He was convinced of Malthus' theory that any attempt to raise the standard of living of the poorest section of the population above subsistence level would only result in increased population which would make matters worse.

In October, 1846, Trevelyan wrote that the overpopulation of Ireland "being altogether beyond the power of man, the cure has been applied by the direct stroke of an all-wise Providence in a manner as unexpected and as unthought of as it is likely to be effectual." Two years later after perhaps a million people had died, he wrote, "The matter is awfully serious, but we are in the hands of Providence, without a possibility of averting the catastrophe if it is to happen. We can only wait the result." Later that year Trevelyan declared: "The great evil with which we have to contend is not the physical evil of the famine, but the moral evil of the selfish, perverse and turbulent character of the people." (36.) In 1848 Trevelyan was knighted for his services in Ireland.

THE TIMES OF LONDON

The lead story in the August 30th, 1847 edition of the English newspaper, the Times said, "In no other country have men talked treason until they are hoarse, and then gone about begging for sympathy from their oppressors. In no other country have the people been so liberally and unthriftily helped by the nation they denounced and defied." (37.)

In another edition: "They are going. They are going with a vengeance. Soon a Celt will be as rare in Ireland as a Red Indian on the streets of Manhattan...Law has ridden through, it has been taught with bayonets, and interpreted with ruin. Townships levelled to the ground, straggling columns of exiles, workhouses multiplied, and still crowded, express the determination of the Legislature to rescue Ireland from its slovenly old barbarism, and to plant there the institutions of this more civilized land."

"WHAT WE REALLY WANT"

In 1848 Sir Charles Wood, the English Chancellor of the Exchequer, wrote to an Irish landlord: "I am not at all appalled by your tenantry going. That seems to be a necessary part of the process...We must not complain of what we really want to obtain." (38.)

In 1849 Edward Twisleton, the Irish poor Law Commissioner, resigned to protest lack of aid from Britain. The Earl of Clarendon, acting as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, told British Prime Minister Lord John Russel the same day, that "He (Twisleton) thinks that the destitution here [in Ireland] is so horrible, and the indifference of the House of Commons is so manifest, that he is an unfit agent for a policy that must be one of extermination." (39.)

James Wilson, the Editor of the British publication, The Economist, responded to Irish pleas for assistance during the famine by saying, "It is no man's business to provide for another." He thought it was wrong for officials to reallocate scarce resources, since "If left to the natural law of distribution, those who deserve more would obtain it."

Wilson's statements echo those of Thomas Malthus, a political economist who died in 1834. In his most influential work, "Essay on the Principle of Population", he wrote:

"If he cannot get sustenance from his parents, on whom he has a just demand, and if society does not want his labor, he has no claim of right to the smallest portion of food and, in fact, has no business to be where he is."

CHOLERA

In December, 1848, Cholera began to spread through many of the overcrowded workhouses, pauper hospitals, and crammed jails in Ireland. On April 26th, 1849, Lord Clarendon wrote to Prime Minister Russell: "...it is enough to drive one mad, day after day, to read the appeals that are made and meet them all with a negative...At Westport, and other places in Mayo, they have not a shilling to make preparations for the cholera, but no assistance can be given, and there is no credit for anything, as all our contractors are ruined. Surely this is a state of things to justify you asking the House of Commons for an advance, for I don't think there is another legislature in Europe that would disregard such suffering as now exists in the west of Ireland, or coldly persist in a policy of extermination." No advance was granted. (40.)

WORKHOUSES

Initially, the greatest relief to the starving came through the Poor Law (1838), which aimed to provide accommodation for the absolutely destitute in workhouses. There were 130 of them in Ireland in 1845.

"However, the conditions for entry were so strict that people would only go to them as a last resort. Families were torn apart, as women and men lived in different parts of the workhouse, and children were kept separately from adults. Inmates were forbidden to leave, and the food provided consisted of two meals a day, of oatmeal, potatoes and buttermilk. There were strict rules against bad language, alcohol, laziness, malingering and disobedience, and meals had to be eaten in silence. Able-bodied adults had to work at such jobs as knitting (for women) and breaking stones (for men). Children were given industrial training of some sort." (41.)

EMIGRATION

Between 1845 and 1855, nearly two million people had emigrated from Ireland to America and Australia, and another 750,000 to Britain. The Poor Law Extension Act, which made landlords responsible for the maintenance of their own poor, induced some to clear their estates by paying for emigration of the poorer tenants. Although some landlords did so out of humanitarian motives, there were undoubtedly benefits to them, especially those who wanted to consolidate their land holdings or change from the cultivation of land to beef and dairy farming. (42.)

Emigration soared from 75,000 in 1845 to 250,000 in 1851. "This chaotic, panic-stricken and unregulated exodus was the largest single population movement of the nineteenth century." (43.) Thousands of emigrants died onboard 'coffin ships' during the Atlantic crossing. These were little more than rotting hulks, and their owners were plying a speculative trade. There were 17,465 documented deaths in 1847 alone. "Thousands more died at disembarkation centers." (44.)

On August 4th, 1847, The Toronto Globe reported on the arrival of emigrant ships: "The Virginius from Liverpool, with 496 passengers, had lost 158 by death, nearly one third of the whole, and she had 180 sick; above one half of the whole will never see their home in the New World. A medical officer at the quarantine station on Grosse Ile off Quebec reported that 'the few who were able to come on deck were ghastly, yellow-looking spectres, unshaven and hollow-cheeked... not more than six or eight were really healthy and able to exert themselves.' The crew of the ship were all ill, and seven had *died*. On the Erin's Queen 78 passengers had died and 104 were sick. On this ship the captain had to bribe the seamen with a sovereign for each body brought out from the hold. The dead sometimes had to be dragged out with boat hooks, since even their own relatives refused to touch them." (45.)

GROSSE ILE

Regulations at Quebec required all passenger ships coming up the St. Lawrence to stop at quarantine station at Grosse Ile (Isle) for medical inspection. On February 19th, 1847, Dr. Douglas, the medical officer in charge, asked for 3,000 Pound Sterling to prepare for the coming emigration. He was given just under 300 Pounds. The St. Lawrence was covered with ice an inch thick well into May of 1847. The first ship to arrive was the Syria on May 17th.

The Syria had 84 cases of fever on board out of 241 Irish passengers - nine having died in the voyage. The quarantine hospital was built for 150 cases. Four days later, on May 21st, eight ships arrived with a total of 430 fever cases. Three days later seventeen vessels arrived, all with fever. There were now 695 persons in the hospital and 164 on board ship waiting to be taken off. On May 26th, thirty vessels with 10,000 emigrants were waiting at Grosse Isle. On May 31st forty vessels were waiting, extending in a line two miles down the St. Lawrence. About 1,100 cases of fever were on Grosse Isle in sheds, tents, and laid in rows in the little church. A further 45,000 emigrants were expected. (46.)

CENSUS COMMISSIONERS SEE IRELAND BETTER OFF AFTER FAMINE

After mass starvation, death, eviction, and large scale emigration, the British Census Commisioners proclaimed in 1851 that Ireland benefited from the Famine:

"In conclusion, we feel it will be gratifying to your Excellency to find that although the population has been diminished in so remarkable a manner by famine, disease and emigration between 1841 and 1851, and has been since decreasing, the results of the Irish census of 1851 are, on the whole, satisfactory, demonstrating as they do the general advancement of the country." (47.)

QUESTIONS:

How were the Irish reduced to such poverty that millions were dependent on potatoes for food?

What was the main purpose of the Statutes of Kilkenny?

What rights, if any, were left to the native Irish (Catholics) under the Penal Laws?

How were the Irish depicted by English writers and historians quoted in this summary?

Why was food exported during the famine?

Is laissez-faire still a popular form of free-market capitalism?

Does our government allow market forces to determine who gets aid during an earthquake or other disaster?

FOOTNOTES

1. Ranelagh, John O'Beirne, A Short History of Ireland. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, Second edition, 1994. First printing, 1983. p.3
2. O hEithir, Breandan, A Pocket History of Ireland, The O'Brien Press, Dublin, Ireland, 1989. p.13
3. Ibid., p.21
4. Ibid., p.25
5. Ranelagh, p.41
6. O hEithir, p.30
7. Ranelagh, p.63
8. Ibid., p.65
9. O hEithir, p. 30
10. Ranelagh, p.70
11. Ibid., p.70
12. Ibid., p.76
13. Ibid., p.77
14. Litton, Helen, The Irish Famine; An Illustrated History Wolfhound Press Ltd., Dublin, Ireland, 1994. p.8
15. Ibid., p.10
16. Ranelagh, p.111
17. Ibid., p.112
18. Litton, p.22
19. Ranelagh, p.112
20. O Grada Cormac, Ireland before and After the Famine: explorations in economic history 1800-1925, Manchester 1989, 2d edition. p.68
21. Litton, p.24
22. Ibid., p.25
23. Ibid.

24. **Ranelagh, p.114**

25. Ibid., 115

26. Kinealy, Christine, This Great Calamity; The Irish Famine 1845-52, Roberts Rinehart, Boulder Colorado, 1995. p.160

27. Ibid., p.162

28. O Grada, p.68

29. Woodham-Smith, Cecil, 7he Great Hunger; Ireland 1845-1849 Penguin Books, London, England, 1991. First ed. 1962. p.75

30. O Grada, p.41

31. Ranelagh, p.115

32. Gallagher, Michael & Thomas, Paddy's Lament. Harcourt Brace & Company, New York / London, 1982. p.44

33. Ranelagh, p.115

34. Woodham-Smith, p.411

35. Ranelagh, p.116

36. Ibid., p.117

37. Ibid., 117

38. Ibid., p.117

39. Woodham-Smith, p.380

40. Ibid., 381

41. Litton, p.23

42. Campbell, Stephen J., The Great Irish Famine. Famine Museum, Strokestown Park, County Roscommon, Ireland p. 40

43. Ibid., p.40

44. Ranelagh, p.112

45. Campbell, p.41

46. Woodham-Smith, p.220

47. Kinealy, p.296

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I

Laws that Isolated and Impoverished the Irish

UNIT I: Laws that Isolated and Impoverished the Irish

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

1. The student will understand that the mass starvation in Ireland resulted from historical and political forces as well as the potato blight itself.

TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A.

Students will Examine the laws designed to separate, subjugate and impoverish the native Irish.

Activity 1. Students will read excerpted material from A Pocket History of Ireland (p.26-27), The Great Hunger, (p.27-28) "Penal Laws" from The Story of the Irish Race. Students will answer questions following readings and discuss issues.

Activity 2. Students will read excerpted material from A Pocket History of Ireland (p.40-41), the Encyclopedia Americana - International Edition on the economic theory of Laissez Faire and the writings of Thomas Robert Malthus. Students will answer questions following readings and discuss issues.

Activity 3. Students will read "The Destruction of Irish Trade", summarized and excerpted material from The Story of the Irish Race. Students will answer questions following the reading and discuss the issues raised.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL/RESOURCES

MacManus, Seamus, The Story of the Irish Race, The Irish Publishing Co., New York, 1922

O hEithir, Breandan, A Pocket History. of Ireland, The O'Brien Press, Dublin, Ireland, 1989

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Encyclopedia, Americana, Grolier Incorporated, 1992.

The Statutes of Kilkenny

"So successful was this cultural assimilation that two hundred years after the first invaders arrived the English crown was forced to take severe measures at a parliament which assembled in Kilkenny, the heartland of Norman Ireland, in 1366. Its purpose was to preserve the racial purity and cultural separateness of the colonizers, thereby enabling the English crown to retain control over them.

It is a measure of the adaptability of both the Irish and the Normans that the crown was faced with such a problem. Not only were the Normans militarily superior, but their political, social and religious systems were different from those practiced by the natives. They favored central government, walled land cultivated intensively, inheritance through the first-born male, and large abbeys rather than small monastic settlements; and Norman French was their language. They secured their land by building castles, which functioned first as strong-points in the invasion and later as centers of control and power. The native Irish seemed to accept the new way of life as something they could, and had to, live with. Gradually, Gaelic culture prevailed and although the Normans controlled about two-thirds of the country in 1366, military might and political sophistication had not been sufficiently powerful to obliterate the native way of life.

The Duke of Clarence, son of Edward III, presided over the parliament which passed the Statutes of Kilkenny. Their purpose was to prevent further assimilation, by legal and religious penalties. The settlers were forbidden to use the Irish language. They were also forbidden to use Irish names, marry into Irish families, use the Irish mode of dress, adopt any Irish laws and play the Irish game of hurling. The measures were a failure. Gaelicisation had gone too far and by now the native population, having failed to beat the invaders on the field of battle, was in league militarily with the conquerors. By the end of the fifteenth century the English crown ruled only a small area around Dublin, known from its fortifications of earth and wood as 'The Pale' (meaning a fence or boundary). The term has lived on in contemporary politics to describe those who show little understanding of the problems of rural Ireland and whose outlook is conditioned by their metropolitan surroundings."

O hEithir, Breandan, A Pocket
History of Ireland, The O'Brien
Press, Dublin, Ireland, 1989

Questions for discussion:

What was the purpose of the Statutes of Kilkenny?

What would be lost to the English rulers if the Irish and English (Normans) continued to intermarry?

What do you think the term "Beyond the Pale" meant to an Englishman living in 14th century Dublin?

The Penal Laws

"The Penal Laws, dating from 1695, and not repealed in their entirety until Catholic emancipation in 1829, aimed at the destruction of Catholicism in Ireland by a series of ferocious enactments, provoked by Irish support of the Stuarts after the Protestant William of Orange was invited to ascend the English throne in 1688, and England faced the greatest Catholic power in Europe - France. At this critical moment the Catholic Irish took up arms in support of the Stuarts. James II's standard was raised in Ireland, and he, with an Irish Catholic army, was defeated on Irish soil, at the battle of the Boyne, near Drogheda, on July 1, 1690.

The threat to England had been alarming, and vengeance followed. Irish intervention on behalf of the Stuarts was to be made impossible forever by reducing the Catholic Irish to helpless impotence. They were, in the words of a contemporary, to become 'insignificant slaves, fit for nothing but to hew wood and draw water', and to achieve this object the Penal Laws were devised.

In broad outline, they barred Catholics from the army and navy, the law, commerce, and from every civic activity. No Catholic could vote, hold any office under the Crown, or purchase land, and Catholic estates were dismembered by an enactment directing that at the death of a Catholic owner his land was to be divided among all his sons, unless the eldest became a Protestant, when he would inherit the whole. Education was made almost impossible, since Catholics might not attend schools, nor keep schools, nor send their children to be educated abroad. The practice of the Catholic faith was proscribed; informing was encouraged as 'an honorable service' and priest-hunting treated as a sport.

Such were the main provisions of the Penal Code, described by Edmund Burke as 'a machine as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man'.

The material damage suffered through the Penal Laws was great; ruin was widespread, old families disappeared and old estates were broken up; but the most disastrous effects were moral. The Penal Laws brought lawlessness, dissimulation and revenge in their train, and the Irish character, above all the character of the peasantry, did become, in Burke's words, degraded and debased. The upper classes were able to leave the country and many middle-class merchants contrived, with guile, to survive, but the poor Catholic peasant bore the full hardship. His religion, made him an outlaw; in the Irish House of Commons he was described as 'the common enemy', and whatever was inflicted on him he must bear, for where could he look for redress? To his landlord, who was almost invariably an alien conqueror? To the law? Not when every person connected with the law, from the jailer to the judge, was a Protestant who regarded him as 'the common enemy'.

In these conditions suspicion of the law, of the ministers of the law and of all established authority worked into the very nerves and blood of the Irish peasant, and, since the law did not give him justice, he set up his own law. The secret societies, which have been the curse of Ireland, became widespread during the Penal period, and a succession of underground associations, Oak Boys, White Boys and Ribbon Men, gathering in bogs and lonely glens, flouted the law and dispensed a people's justice in the terrible form of revenge. The informer, the supplanter of an evicted tenant, the landlord's man, were punished with dreadful savagery, and since animals were wealth, their unfortunate animals suffered, too. Cattle were 'clifted', driven over the edge of a cliff, horses hamstrung, dogs clubbed to death, stables fired and the animals within, burned alive. Nor were lawlessness, cruelty and revenge the only consequences. During the long Penal period, dissimulation became a moral necessity and evasion of the law the duty of every god-fearing Catholic. To worship according to his faith, the Catholic must attend illegal meetings; to protect his priest, he must be secret, cunning, and a concealer of the truth.

These were dangerous lessons for any government to compel its subjects to learn, and a dangerous habit of mind for any nation to acquire."

Woodham-Smith, Cecil, The Great Hunger; Ireland 1845-1849 p.27-28 Penguin Books, London, England, 1991. First printing: 1962.

Irish Famine
Unit I
Activity 1

PENAL LAWS

"Professor Lecky, a Protestant of British blood and ardent British sympathy, says in his History of Ireland in the 18th Century that the object of the Penal Laws was threefold:

1. To deprive the Catholics of all civil life
2. To reduce them to a condition of most extreme and brutal ignorance
3. To dissociate them from the soil

He might, with absolute justice, substituted Irish for Catholics-and added, (4) to expirate (cause to expire) the Race.

The Irish Catholic was forbidden the exercise of his religion.
He was forbidden to receive education,
He was forbidden to enter a profession.
He was forbidden to hold public office.
He was forbidden to engage in trade or commerce.
He was forbidden to live in a corporate town or within five miles thereof.
He was forbidden to own a horse of greater value than five pounds.
He was forbidden to purchase land.
He was forbidden to lease land.
He was forbidden to accept a mortgage on land in security for a loan.
He was forbidden to vote.

He was forbidden to keep any arms for his protection.
He was forbidden to hold a life annuity.
He was forbidden to buy land from a Protestant.
He was forbidden to receive a gift of land from a Protestant.
He was forbidden to inherit land from a Protestant.
He was forbidden to inherit anything from a Protestant.
He was forbidden to rent any land that was worth more than thirty shillings a year.
He was forbidden to reap from his land any profit exceeding a third of the rent.
He could not be guardian to a child.
He could not, when dying, leave his infant children under Catholic guardianship.
He could not attend Catholic worship.
He was compelled by law to attend Protestant worship.
He could not himself educate his child.
He could not send his child to a Catholic teacher.
He could not employ a Catholic teacher to come to his child.
He could not send his child abroad to receive education."

MacManus, Seamus, Story of the Irish Race, Devin-Adair Co., Grenwich, Connecticut, 1979 p.458-459

Irish Famine
Unit I

Activity 1

Questions for discussion:

What was the purpose of the Penal Laws?

How was religion used to divide the Irish from the English?

Why was the education of Catholics forbidden?

In what sense did an Irish Catholic exist under the Penal Laws?

Irish Famine
Unit I
Activity 2

The Famine

"A terrible national calamity which decimated the population and all but killed the Irish language (the everyday speech in areas ravaged by famine) was now occupying everyone's attention. The great potato famines of 1845-51 reduced the population from 8 million to 6.6 million through starvation, disease and emigration to Britain and America. The Napoleonic war in Europe led to the growth in tillage farming to supply the armies. When it ended in 1815 it had a marked effect on the Irish economy. The potato had become the staple food for most of the rural population, but with the war's end came a change from tillage to pasture. This caused much unemployment and the unemployed depended entirely on small patches of sub-divided land to grow enough potatoes to sustain them. The population had increased to 8 million, two-thirds of them depending on agriculture, much of which was at minimal level. When the potato crop was destroyed by blight the result was devastating: the people's only source of food was gone.

Although the government in London was aware of the threatening problem, Ireland was not a major preoccupation and the famine had assumed the proportion of a crisis before schemes were implemented on a large scale. Even when they were it seemed that the crisis was of secondary importance when it came to preserving the economic policies of the day. These policies were based on the principle of non-interference with market forces in economic matters. Although the potato crop failed, the country was still producing and exporting more than enough grain crops to feed the population. But that was a 'money crop' and not a 'food crop' and could not be interfered with. The relief schemes were frequently hastily thought up, and parts of Ireland still contain roads that lead to nowhere in particular - built during be famine. These are known as boithre na mine (meal roads) in Irish because a day's work was paid for with imported Indian meal. Other relief schemes were organized by proselytizing Protestants who handed out food accompanied by religious tracts. Some Catholics did convert to the Protestant faith and were promptly christened 'soupers' (from the soup kitchen run by the proselytizers) as a mark of contempt by their stauncher fellow Catholic neighbors.

This disaster, one of the greatest to happen in a European country in peacetime, was a tragic condemnation of the Union. For the dilatory manner in which the crisis was dealt with in London was a result of sheer ignorance. The Times of London wrote the obituary of the Irish nation by writing that soon an Irishman in his native land would be as rare as an American Indian in his."

O hEithir, Breandan, A Pocket History of Ireland, The O'Brien Press, Dublin, Ireland, 1989

Irish Famine
Unit I
Activity 2

"MALTHUS, mal'thes, Thomas Robert (1766-1834), British economist, whose theories of population and food supply had a deep influence on later economists, historians, and demographers. He was born near Guilford Surrey, England, on Feb. 14, 1766, the son of a well-to-do country gentleman. He entered Cambridge in 1784, where he became interested in mathematics. In 1797 he took holy orders and briefly occupied a country parish. After some travel, he was appointed (1805) professor of history and political economy at Haileybury, the college established by the East India Company for its cadets. There he remained for the rest of his life. He died near Bath, England, on Dec. 29, 1834.

Malthus' father was of liberal views, a friend of Jean Jacques Rousseau and an admirer of William Godwin and the marquis de Condorcet, all of whom represented the high hopes for social progress associated with the 18th century Enlightenment, the Age of Reason. But the younger Malthus, partly because of his training and partly because the intellectual climate in England had become ultraconservative following the French Revolution, came to opposite and more pessimistic conclusions about e future of mankind. His argument rested on two "postulata"-that food is necessary for existence, and that "the passion between the sexes is necessary and will remain." He asserted that "the human species would increase in the ratio of 1, 2, 4, 8... and subsistence as 1, 2, 3, 4.... " Thus population growth would be checked by inadequate food supplies, reducing the majority to a bare subsistence.

These views, implying that Nature was destructive of any hope for lessening poverty, and poor relief was self-defeating, were expressed in a short pamphlet, *Essay on the Principles of Population* (1798), which projected him into public attention with a vengeance. Very few works of equal brevity have aroused so much wrath or have been so influential. This attention was the more remarkable since Malthus' ideas were not original (as he admitted) and were based on assertion, not observation. Nevertheless, his argument helped shape public policy for generations, and is even invoked today.

Malthusian population doctrine has generally been used to 'blame the victim"-that is, to support the belief that the ultimate source of poverty is the lack of foresight of the poor. In the first edition of the *Essay*, where the argument was presented with simplistic certainty, the only "checks" on overpopulation were said to be vice and, especially, misery. In later editions he admitted that late marriage would be another check to population. Still later, in his *Principles of Political Economy* (1820), he altered the argument further by relating population growth not directly to food supplies but to increasing employment opportunities. Thus general economic progress would "have a favorable effect upon the poor" if they were industrious and frugal. But it was his first and harshest statement that caught the public eye.

Malthus also popularized or contributed other principles to the new science of political economy. In 1815 he developed a theory of land-rent based on the principle of "diminishing returns." This holds that successive units of productive inputs, such as labor or capital, when applied to a given amount of land, would result in progressively smaller units of output (food).

Diminishing returns reinforces the dismal prospects of his population principle, since it means that as population grows, more and more labor will be needed to produce each unit of food.

But the argument ignored the effect of scientific agriculture, the opening of new, more fertile lands, and technological progress generally. All of these have increased agricultural output per unit of input and made possible a rising standard of living for a larger population. Besides the "population principle" and "diminishing returns," Malthus conceived the notion that accumulation of capital, the foundation of industrial production, could go forward too rapidly. In that case, he said, too much would be produced, and the market would suffer from a "glut" of unsold goods. Looking at this problem from a conservative view, as he generally did, Malthus found the solution in the exaggerated consumption habits and large numbers of servants employed by the well-to-do landowning class. He asserted that "a body of unproductive consumers was needed to preserve a "balance between produce and consumption."

But, as his great adversary (and friend) David Ricardo saw, England's industrial prosperity in the 1820's required more productive capital-that is, wage-goods as well as factories and machines-and not more unproductive consumers. Ricardo's views, which reflected industrialists' and workers' interests as opposed to landowners', carried the day-all too well in fact, hardening into a dogma that survived for over a century.

Then in 1936, during the Great Depression, Malthus' theory of overproduction and "glut' was rescued from obscurity by John Maynard Keynes, who praised him for having anticipated by over a century the source of depressions. Keynes' theoretical model, like Malthus', was designed to preserve the status quo. Thus, paradoxically, the ideas for which Malthus was best known in his own time have been largely discarded or disproven, while the doctrine least accepted in his day has been raised from the dead, as it were, in modern Keynesianism."

H. John Thorkelson
University of Connecticut

Encyclopedia Americana, Grolier Incorporated, 1992. First printing: 1829

"LAISSEZ FAIRE, le-sa-far', a phrase that epitomized 19th century economic and political philosophy in the English-speaking world. The term usually is translated to mean "leave it (the economic system) alone." It calls for and supports a "hands-off" policy on the part of government. The phrase itself is originally French. The thought behind it, however, is English as well. In the 18th century, great emphasis was placed on natural law throughout Western Europe. It was held that the natural order of things was best designed to produce the most beneficent results for mankind, if man would only leave it alone. This spurred investigations in the natural sciences to discover the immutable laws of nature. Philosophically, mankind was urged to accept and follow these laws. In political and economic organization, laissez hire became the accepted policy.

The most vocal arguments in the 18th century came from France. A group known today as the Physiocrats, who called themselves "les economistes,' carried the philosophical arguments of natural law into the social field. A French merchant named Legendre is credited with saying in 1680 that if you want to advance commerce and industry "leave them alone" *(laissez faire)*. The injunction was directed at the French government of that day, which was stifling industry and trade with excessive regulation. The argument was carried into the political field by the marquis d'Argueseau, who in 1753 declared that "to govern better, it is necessary to govern less." This point of view found its way into American political philosophy in the form of the Jeffersonian "The least governed are the best governed."

It remained for Adam Smith, the father of modern economics, to provide a definitive philosophical justification for a policy of laissez faire in economic affairs. That was the doctrine of the "invisible hand" propounded in his Wealth of Nations. (1776) The argument ran that people, if left to their own devices and unimpeded by governmental regulation, would conduct their economic activities as if guided by an unseen, invisible hand so as to maximize both their own and their society's economic well-being. This represented an ultimate faith in natural law and in each individual's relation to the natural order.

Practically, a policy of laissez hire meant extreme individualism in economic and political affairs, and a "hands-off" attitude on the part of government. "Free trade," "free enterprise," "rugged individualism," and "free competition", are all phrases that represent laissez hire in action, particularly in the English-speaking world of the 19th century. The freedom so frequently referred to is freedom from all but the minimum amount of governmental intervention.

Laissez faire and the philosophy of natural law from which it emanates are no longer dominant economic forces. In the 20th century, greater emphasis has been placed on mankind stability to master its fate through collective action. Trade unions and manufacturers' associations represent this trend. Governmental intervention or regulation "for the good of all" has in many areas superseded free and untrammeled individualism. Laissez faire - now often referred to as the market economy - is now only one of many policies vying for preeminence in the economic affairs of the Western World."

WILLIAM N. KINNARD, Jr.
University of Connecticut

Encyclopedia Americana, Grolier Incorporated, 1992.

Questions for discussion:

Should a laissez faire policy have been applied to Ireland during a time when the main food crop of the poor was devastated? In other words, should the market forces of supply and demand be altered during a mass starvation?

Should the colonial power allow exports of food from a country because greater profits are to be obtained elsewhere?

If British government officials believed Malthus' theory that population growth is to be halted by inadequate food supplies, and that poor relief was self-defeating, how should they respond to the Irish Famine?

What if the food supplies in Ireland were adequate, but the poor could not afford them? What should be the policy then?

The Destruction of Irish Trade

The early Irish were famous for their excellence in arts and crafts, especially for their wonderful work in metals, bronze, silver and gold. By the beginning of the 14th century trading ships were constantly sailing between Ireland and the leading ports of the Continent.

COMPETITION WITH ENGLAND

This commerce was a threat to English merchants who tried to discourage such trade. They brought pressure on their government, which passed a law in 1494 that prohibited the Irish from exporting any industrial product, unless it was shipped through an English port, with an English permit after paying English fees. However, England was not able to enforce the law. By 1548 British merchants were using armed vessels to attack and plunder trading ships travelling between Ireland and the Continent. (unofficial piracy)

ENGLISH MEN, ENGLISH SHIPS, ENGLISH CREWS, ENGLISH PORTS AND IRISH GOODS

In 1571 Queen Elizabeth ordered that no cloth or stuff made in Ireland could be exported, even to England, except by English men in Ireland. The act was amended in 1663 to prohibit the use of all foreign-going ships, except those that were built in England, mastered and three-fourths manned by English, and cleared from English ports. The return cargoes had to be unloaded in England. Ireland's shipbuilding industry was thus destroyed and her trade with the Continent wiped out.

TRADE WITH THE COLONIES

Ireland then began a lucrative trade with the Colonies. That was "cured" in 1670 by a new law which forbade Ireland to export to the colonies "anything except horses, servants, and victuals." England followed with a decree that no Colonial products could be landed in Ireland until they had first landed in England and paid all English rates and duties.

Ireland was forbidden to engage in trade with the colonies and plantations of the New World if it involved sugar, tobacco, cotton, wool, rice, and numerous other items. The only item left for Ireland to import was rum. The English wanted to help English rum makers in the West Indies at the expense of Irish farmers and distillers.

IRISH WOOL TRADE CURTAILED, THEN DESTROYED

When the Irish were forbidden to export their sheep, they began a thriving trade in wool. In 1634 The Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord Stafford, wrote to King Charles I: "All wisdom advises us to keep this (Irish) kingdom as much subordinate and dependent on England as possible; and, holding them from manufacture of wool (which unless otherwise directed, I shall by all means discourage), and then enforcing them to fetch their cloth from England, how can they depart from us without nakedness and beggary?"

In 1660 even the export of wool from Ireland to England was forbidden. Other English laws prohibited all exports of Irish wool in any form. In 1673, Sir William Temple advised that the Irish would act wisely by giving up the manufacture of wool even for home use, because "it tended to interfere prejudicially with the English woolen trade."

George II sent three warships and eight other armed vessels to cruise off the coast of Ireland to seize all vessels carrying woolens from Ireland. "So ended the fairest promise that Ireland had ever known of becoming a prosperous and a happy country."

LINEN TRADE REPRESSED

Irish linen manufacturing met with the same fate when the Irish were forbidden to export their product to all other countries except England. A thirty percent duty was levied in England, effectively prohibiting the trade. English manufacturers, on the other hand, were granted a bounty for all linen exports.

BEEF, PORK, BUTTER AND CHEESE

In 1665 Irish cattle were no longer welcome in England, so the Irish began killing them and exporting the meat. King Charles II declared that the importation of cattle, sheep, swine and beef from Ireland was henceforth a common nuisance, and forbidden. Pork and bacon were soon prohibited, followed by butter and cheese.

SILK AND TOBACCO

In the middle of the 18th century, Ireland began developing a silk weaving industry. Britain imposed a heavy duty on Irish silk, but British manufactured silk was admitted to Ireland duty-free. Ireland attempted to develop her tobacco industry, but that too was prohibited.

FISH

In 1819 England withdrew the subsidy for Irish fisheries and increased the subsidies to British fishermen - with the result that Ireland's possession of one of the longest coastlines in Europe, still left it with one of the most miserable fisheries.

GLASS

Late in the 18th century the Irish became known for their manufacture of glass. George II forbade the Irish to export glass to any country whatsoever under penalty of forfeiting ship, cargo and ten shillings per pound weight.

THE RESULT

By 1839, a French visitor to Ireland, Gustave de Beaumont, was able to write:

"In all countries, more or less, paupers may be discovered; but an entire nation of paupers is what was never seen until it was shown in Ireland. To explain the social condition of such a country, it would be only necessary to recount its miseries and its sufferings; the history of the poor is the history of Ireland."

CONCLUSION

From the 15th through the 19th centuries, successive English monarchies and governments enacted laws designed to suppress and destroy Irish manufacturing and trade. These repressive Acts, coupled with the Penal Laws, reduced the Irish people to "nakedness and beggary" in a very direct and purposeful way. The destitute Irish then stood at the very brink of the bottomless pit. When the potato blight struck in 1845, it was but time for the final push.

Summarized from pages 483-492 of:
MacManus, Seamus, The Story of the Irish Race, New York, The Irish Publishing Company, 1922

Irish Famine
Unit 1
Activity 3

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

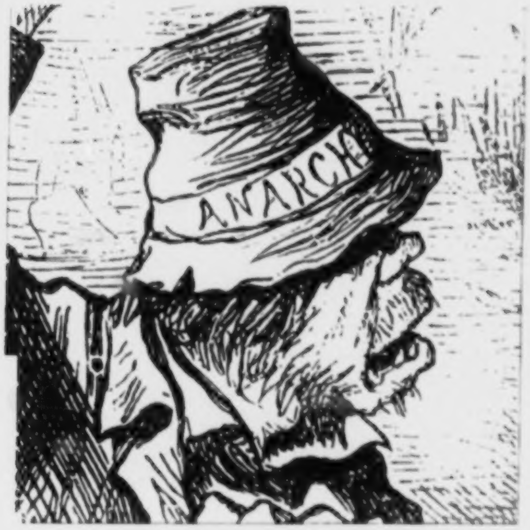
Why did the English wish to have complete control over Irish trade and manufacturing?

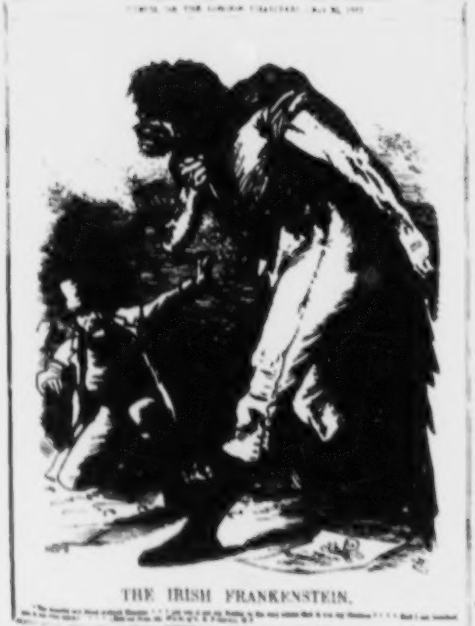
What do you think would be the long-term effects of halting every attempt by a people to export their goods?

How does this story help us understand how the Irish became impoverished enough to live off potatoes?

Is this kind of governmental interference in trade the opposite of laissez faire?

II
Racism





THE IRISH FRANKENSTEIN.

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UNIT II - Racism

ADDITIONAL UNIT GOALS:

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

1.

The student will be able to define and give examples of anti-Irish racism, and relate them to the Irish Famine experience.

TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A.

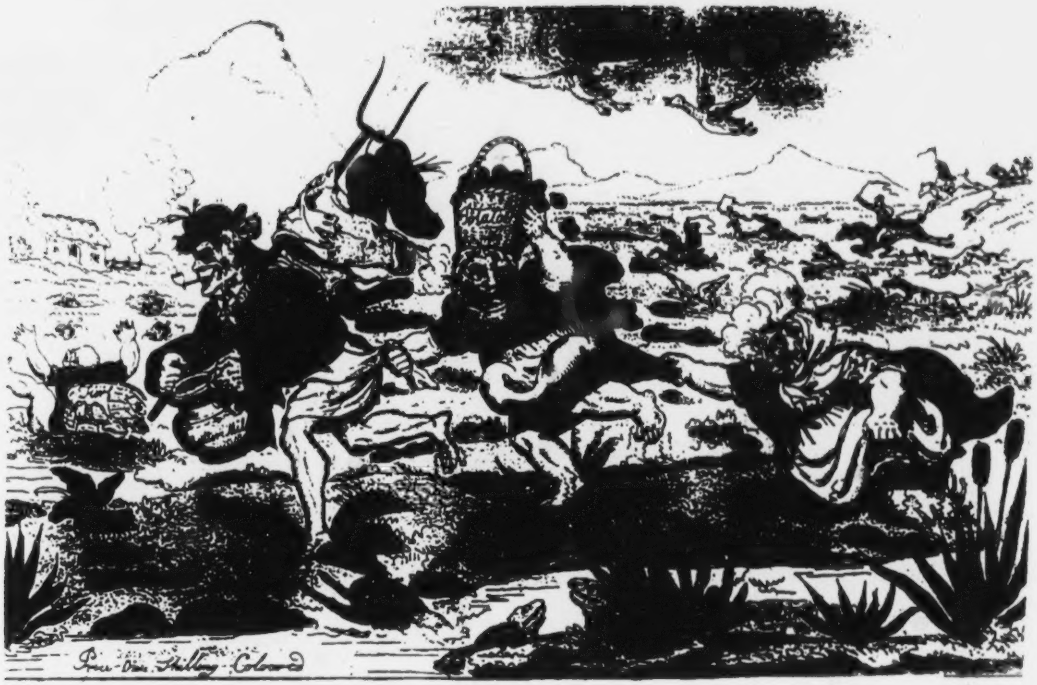
Students will learn that anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic discrimination have been an inherent part of British colonial rule in Ireland. Students will also examine this racism in the context of racism against other peoples.

Activity 1. Students will view anti-Irish cartoons, finding, listing and discussing racist stereotypes.

Activity 2. Students will read "Out of Africa, Out of Ireland" and "British Racism: Before, During and After the Famine". They will then answer questions following the readings and discuss the issues raised.

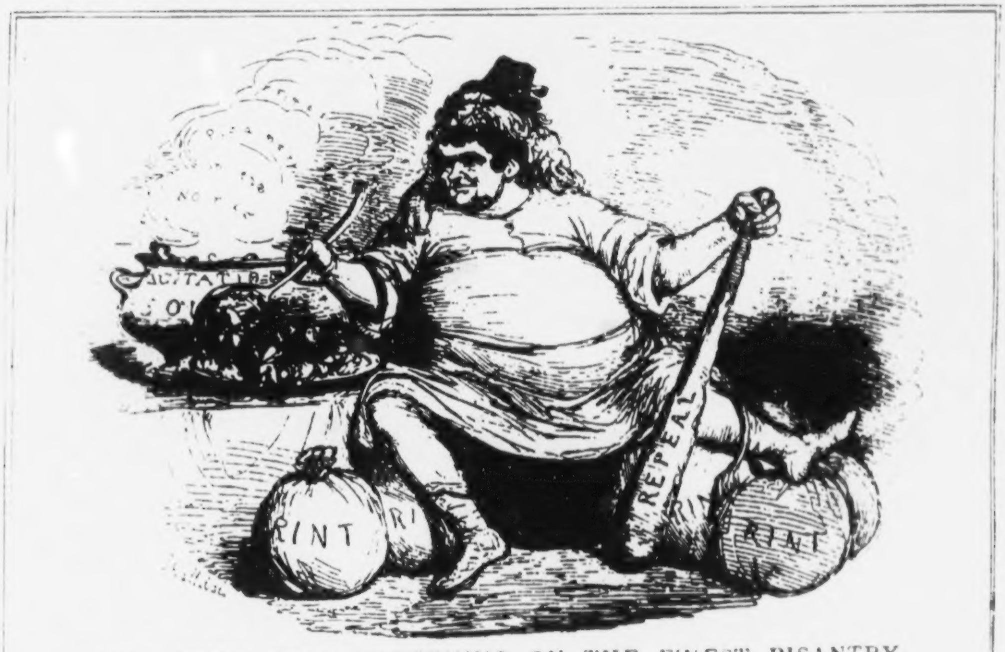
INSTRUCTIONAL, MATERIAL/RESOURCES

"Out of Africa, Out of Ireland" and "British Racism: Before, During, and After the Famine". (see footnotes for sources)


Price One Shilling Coloured

Bog Trotters

A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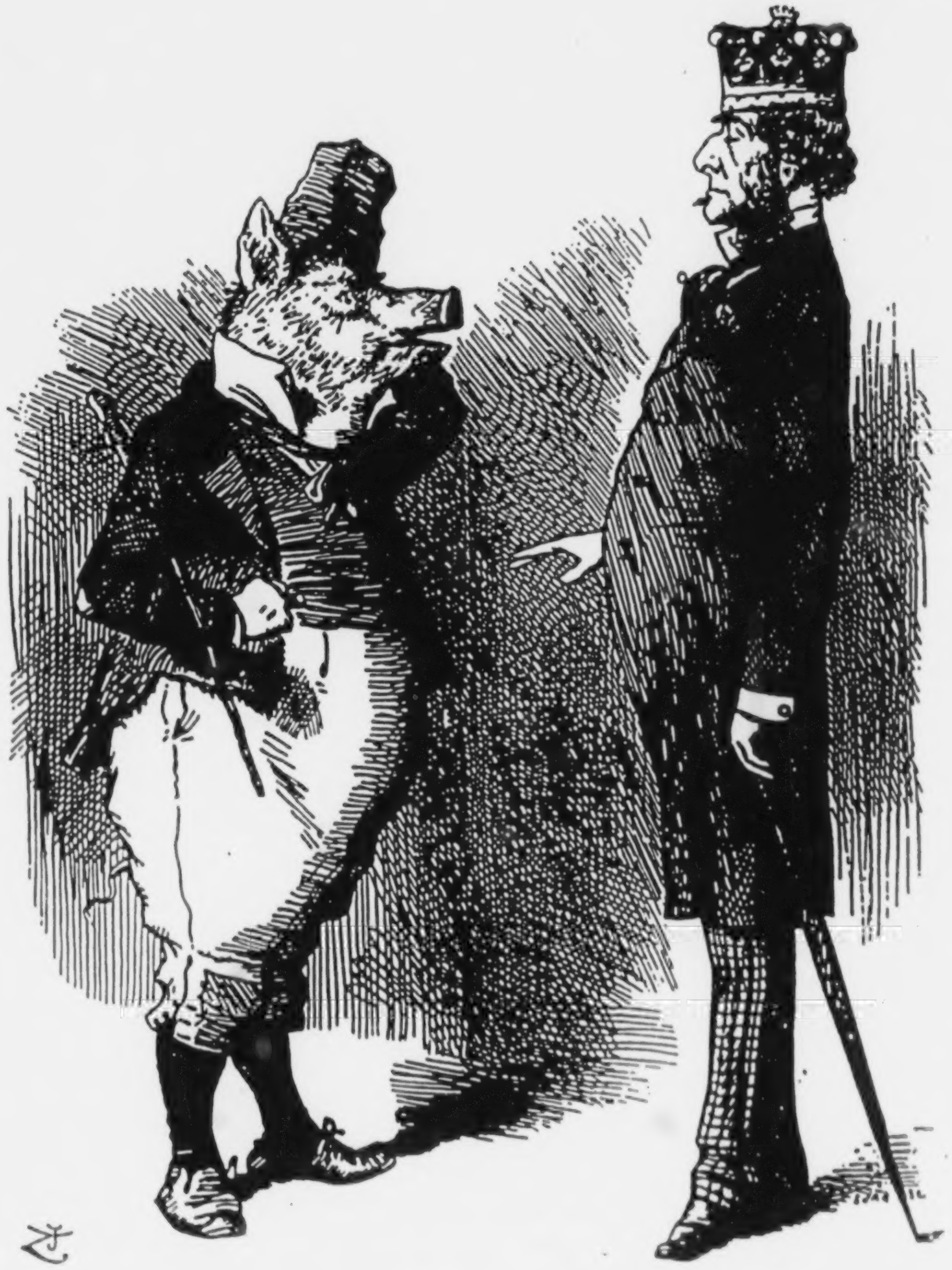
THE IRISH OGRE FATTENING ON THE FINEST PISANTRY.

B

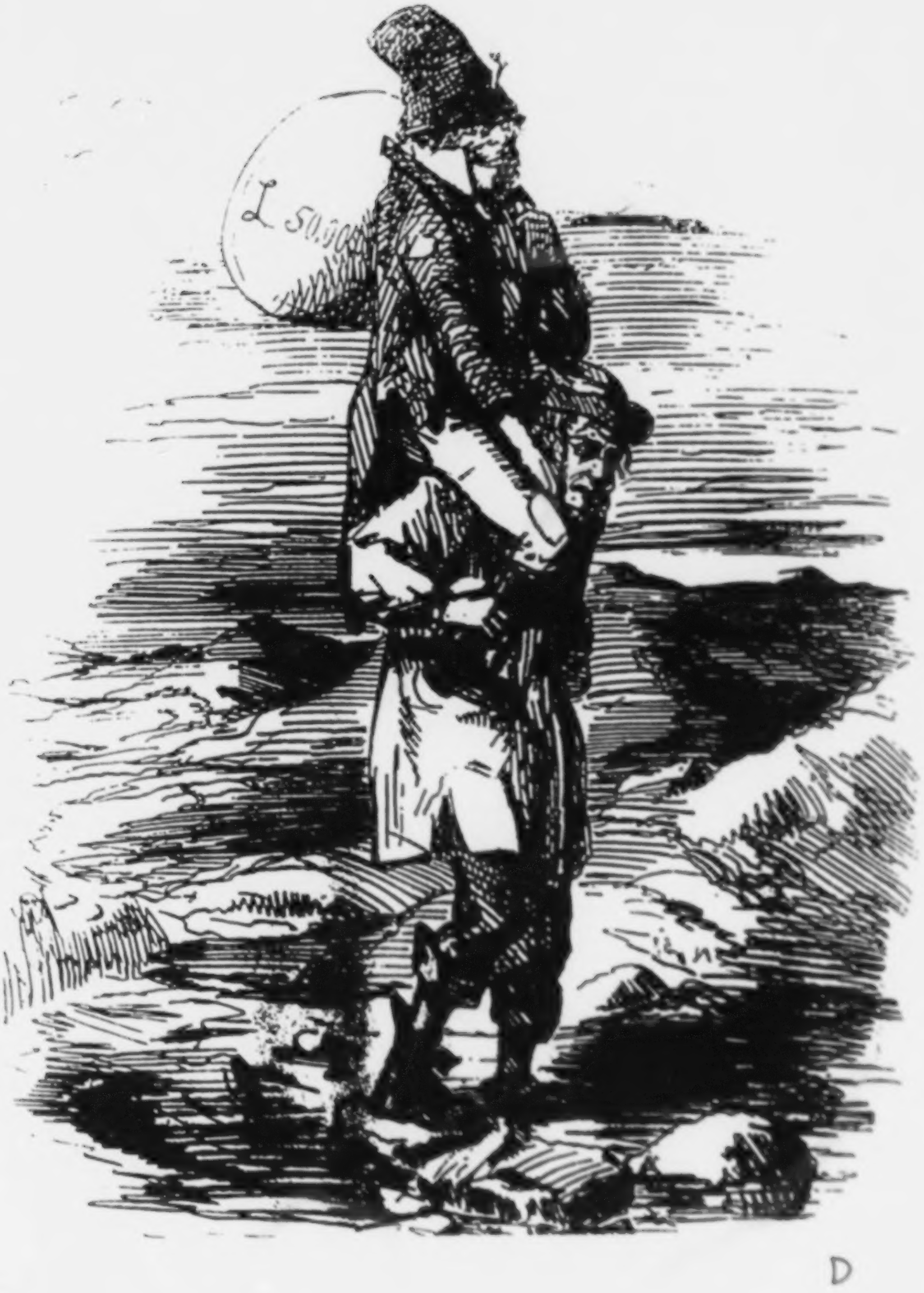


THE PIG AND THE PEER.

PIG. "BEDAD, MELORD, AND IS IT MESELF THAT'S TO BE EVICTED?"

PEER (*tenderly*). "YOU EVICTED! NO, NO. WE'LL TAKE THE GREATEST CARE OF THE 'GENTLEMAN WHO PAYS THE RENT.'"

C



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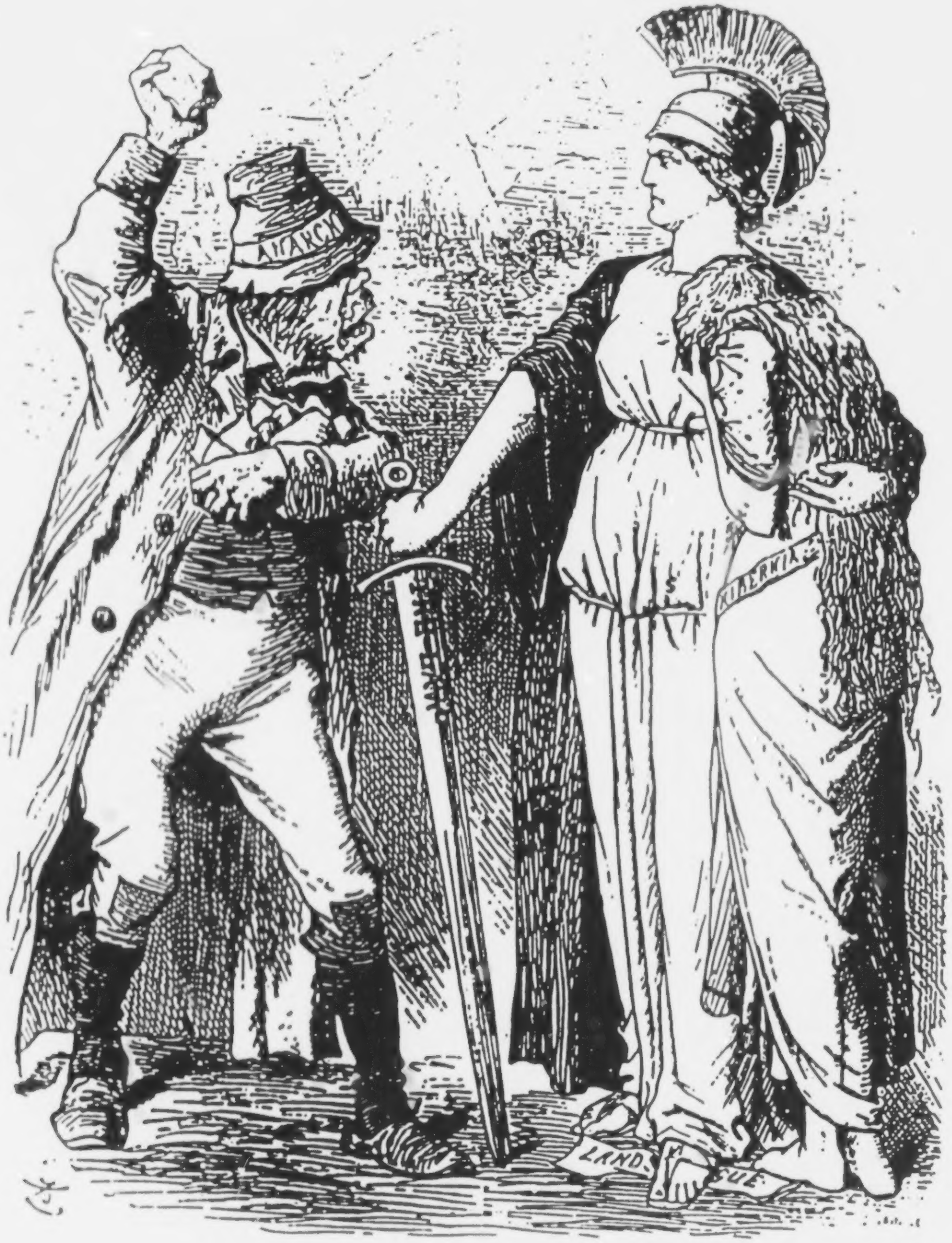
ANARCHY
HIBERNIA
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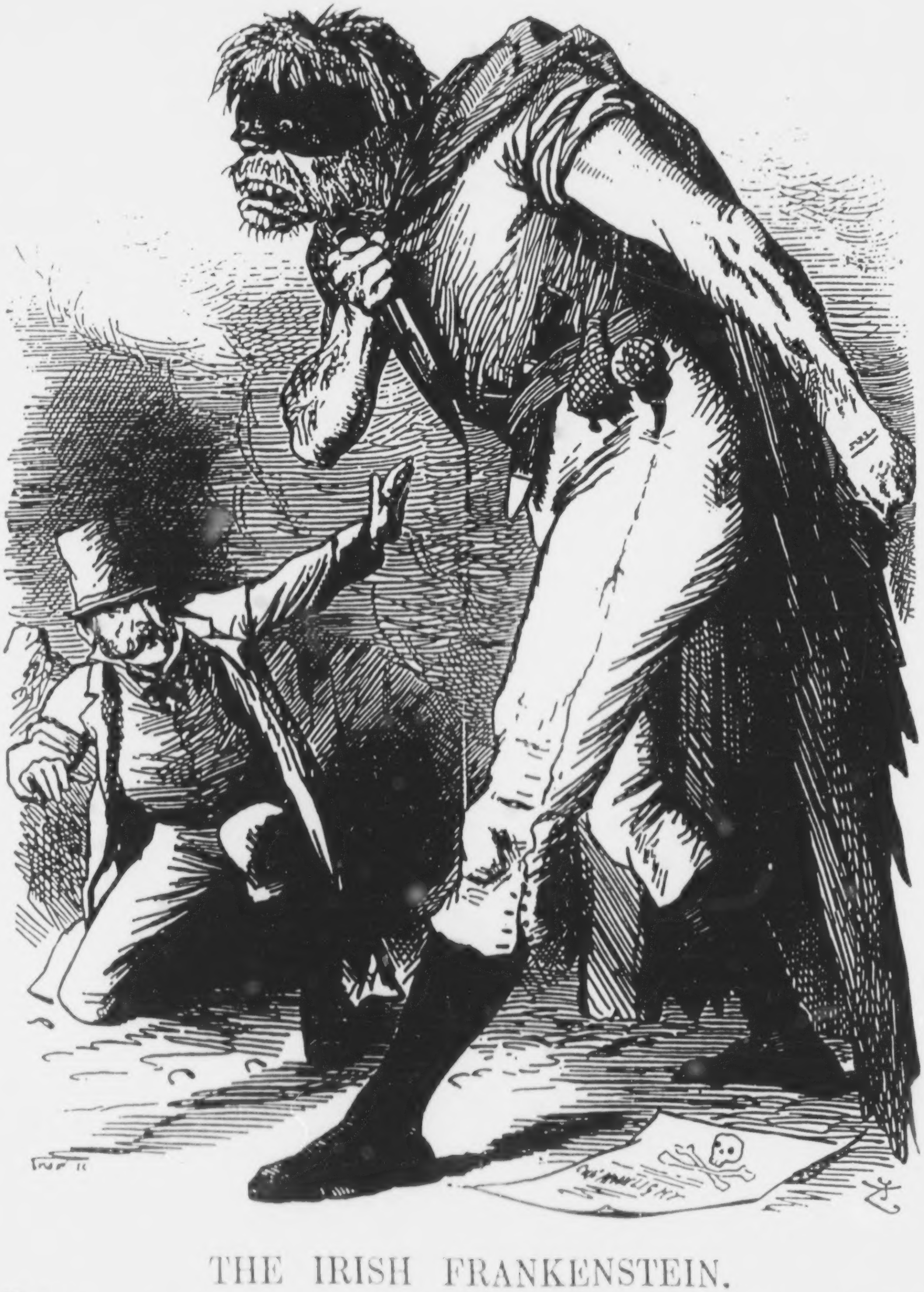
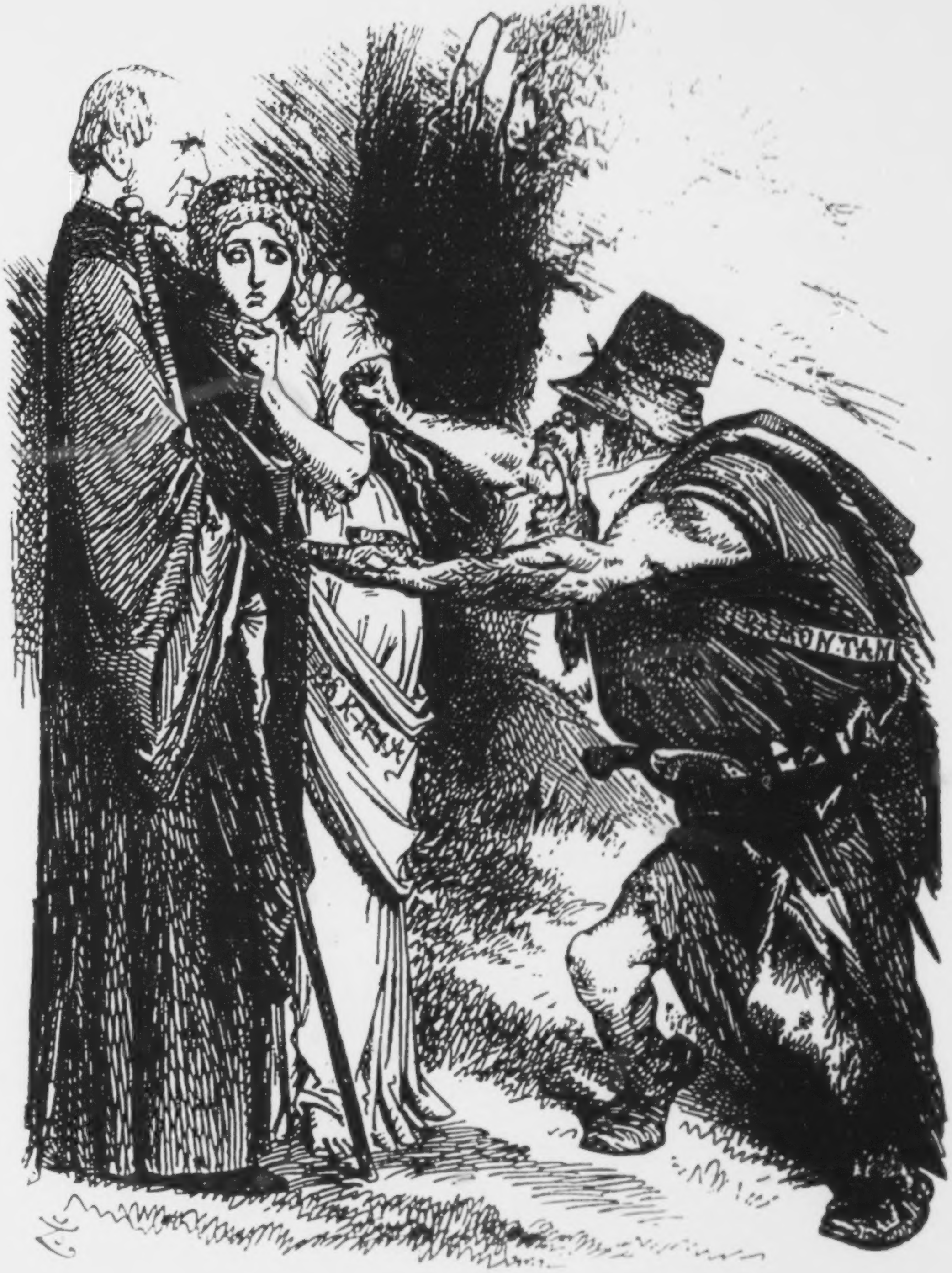
E.

TWO FORCES.



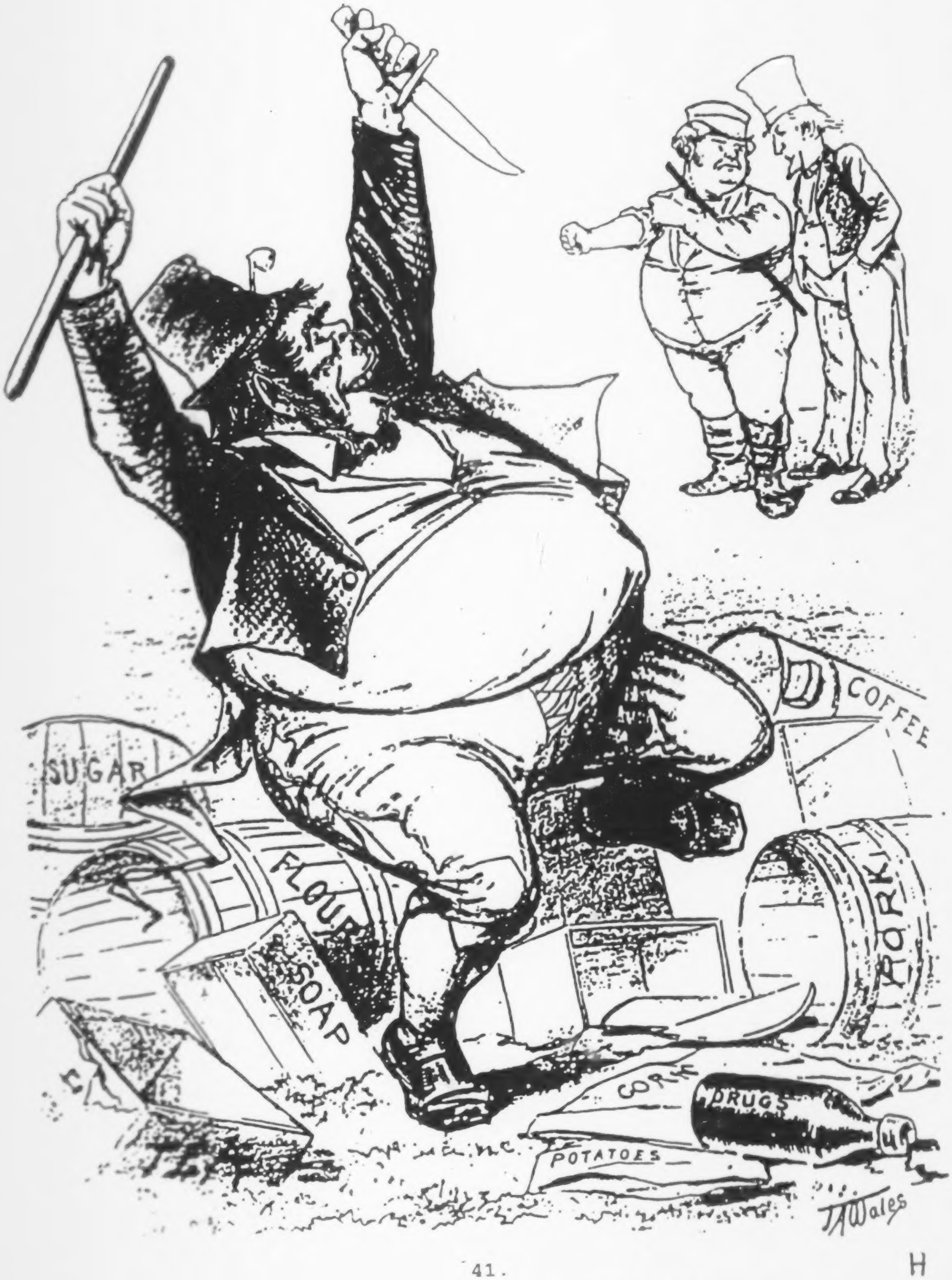
THE IRISH FRANKENSTEIN.

"The baneful and blood-stained Monster * * * yet was it not my Master to the very extent that it was my Creature? * * * Had I not breathed into it my own spirit?" * * * (*Extract from the Works of* C. S. P-RN-LL, M.P.



THE IRISH "TEMPEST."

CALIBAN (RORY OF THE HILLS). "THIS ISLAND'S MINE, BY SYCORAX MY MOTHER, WHICH THOU TAK'ST FROM ME."—*Shakspeare.*


SUGAR
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H

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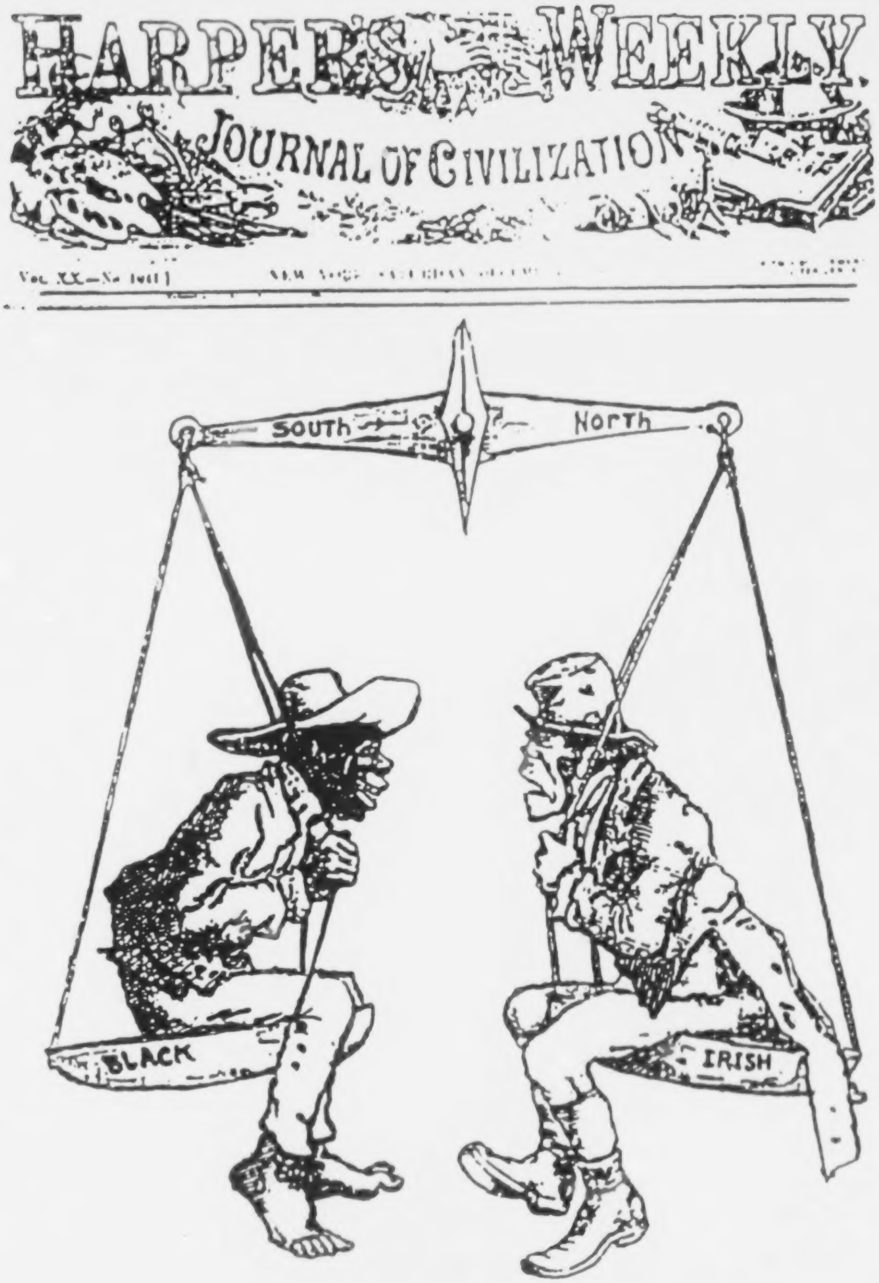
HARPER'S WEEKLY
JOURNAL OF CIVILIZATION
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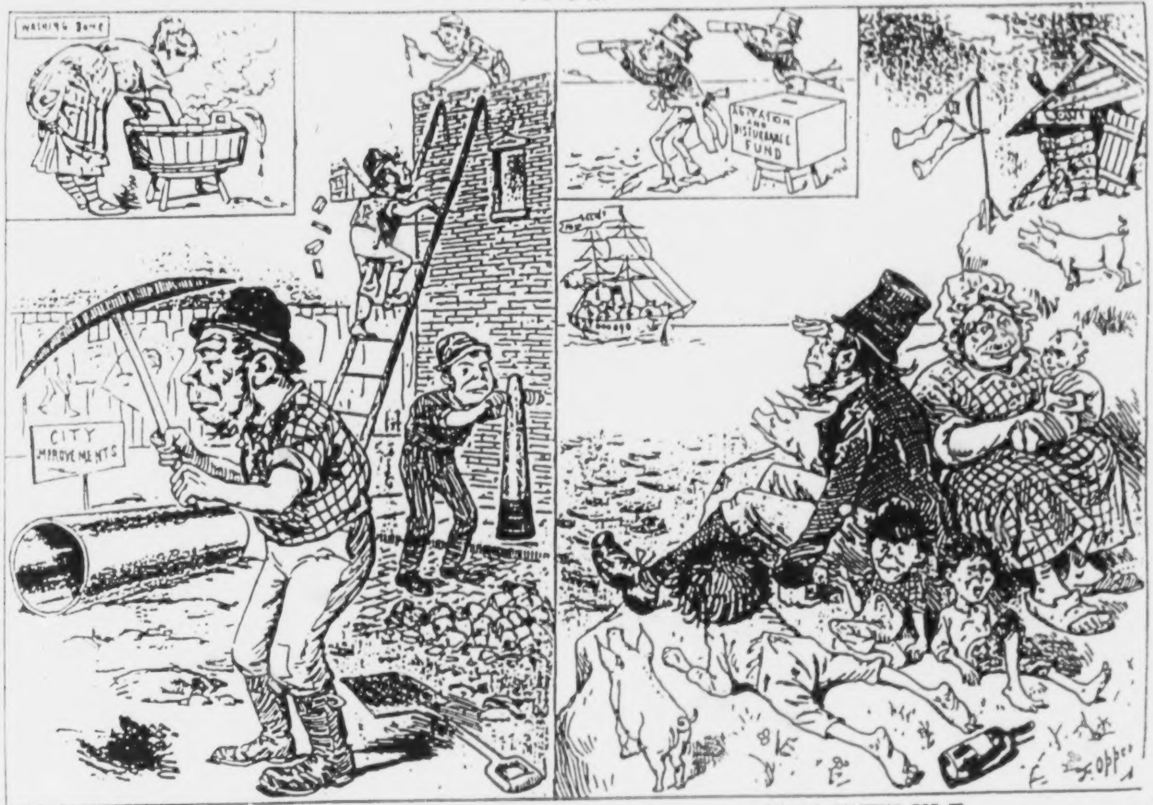
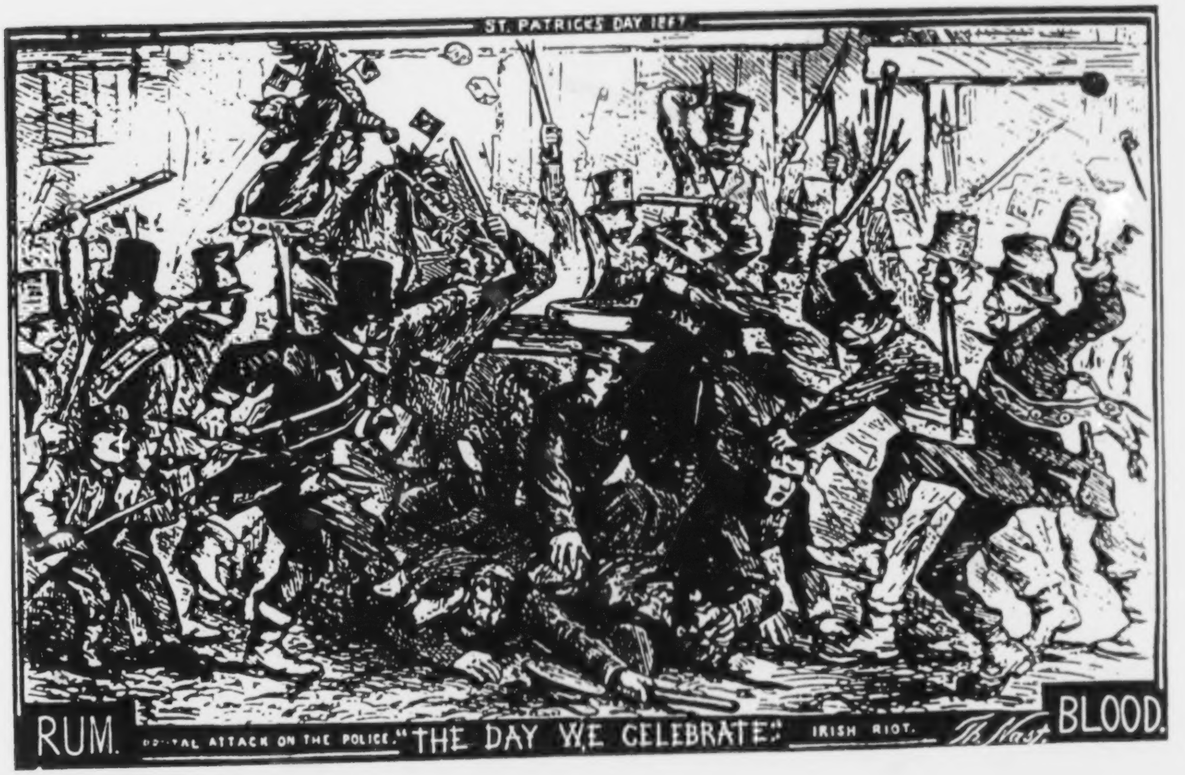
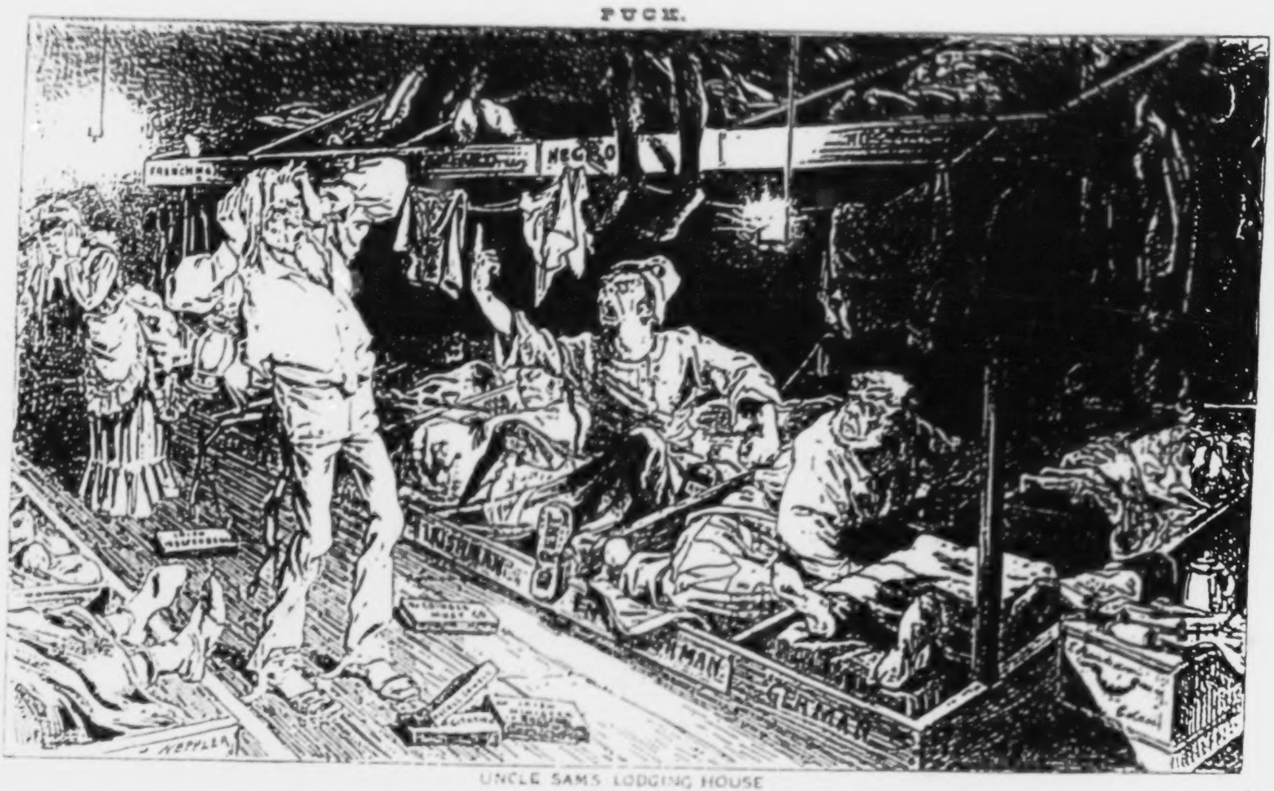

WASHING DONE
CITY IMPROVEMENTS
AGITATION AND DISTURBANCE FUND
Opper

UNITED STATES - WORKING FOR IT. AMERICAN GOLD. IRELAND - WAITING FOR IT.

J

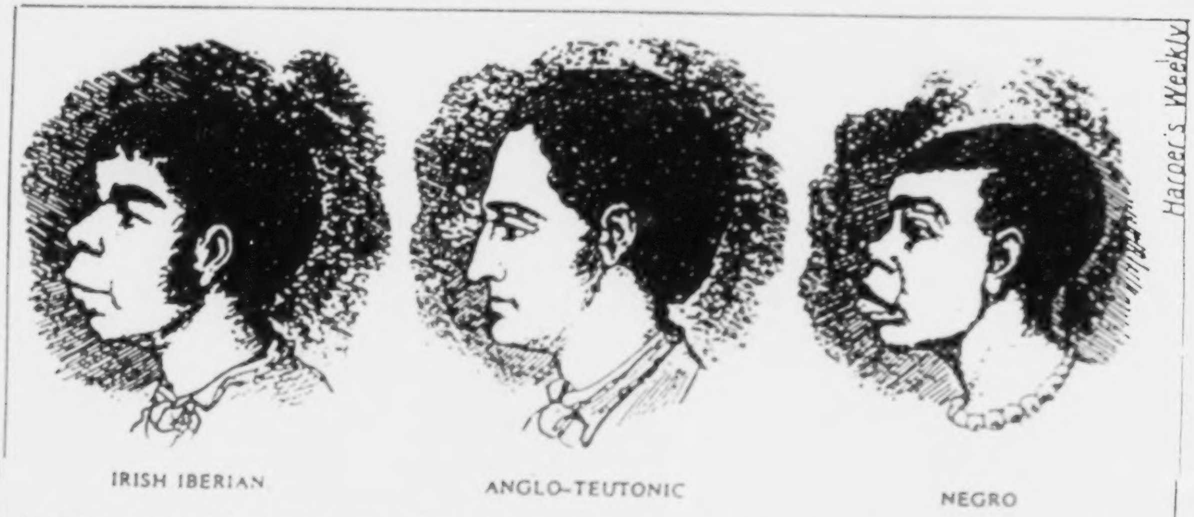

ST. PATRICKS DAY 1867
RUM.
...TAL ATTACK ON THE POLICE.
"THE DAY WE CELEBRATE."
IRISH RIOT.
Th. Nast.
BLOOD.

K



UNCLE SAMS LODGING HOUSE

L



IRISH IBERIAN ANGLO-TEUTONIC NEGRO

The Iberians are believed to have been originally an African race, who thousands of years ago spread themselves through Spain over Western Europe. Their remains are found in the barrows, or burying places, in sundry parts of these countries. The skulls are of low, prognathous type. They came to Ireland, and mixed with the natives of the South and West, who themselves are supposed to have been of low type and descendants of savages of the Stone Age, who, in consequence of isolation from the rest of the world, had never been out competed in the healthy struggle of life, and thus made way, according to the laws of nature, for superior races.

M

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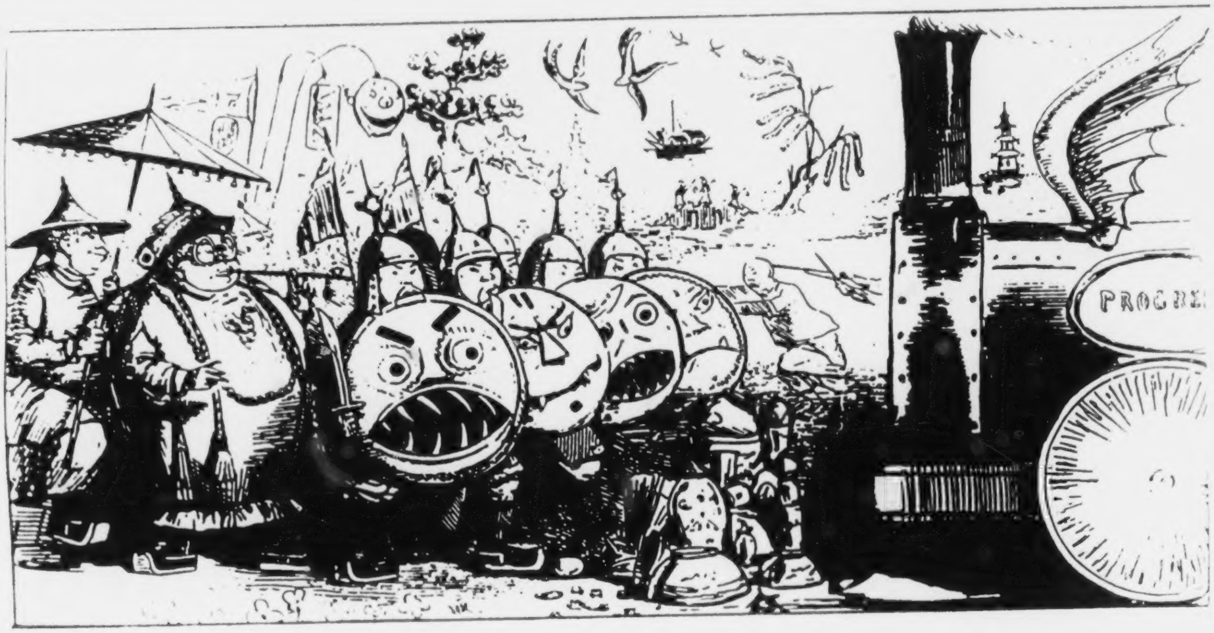

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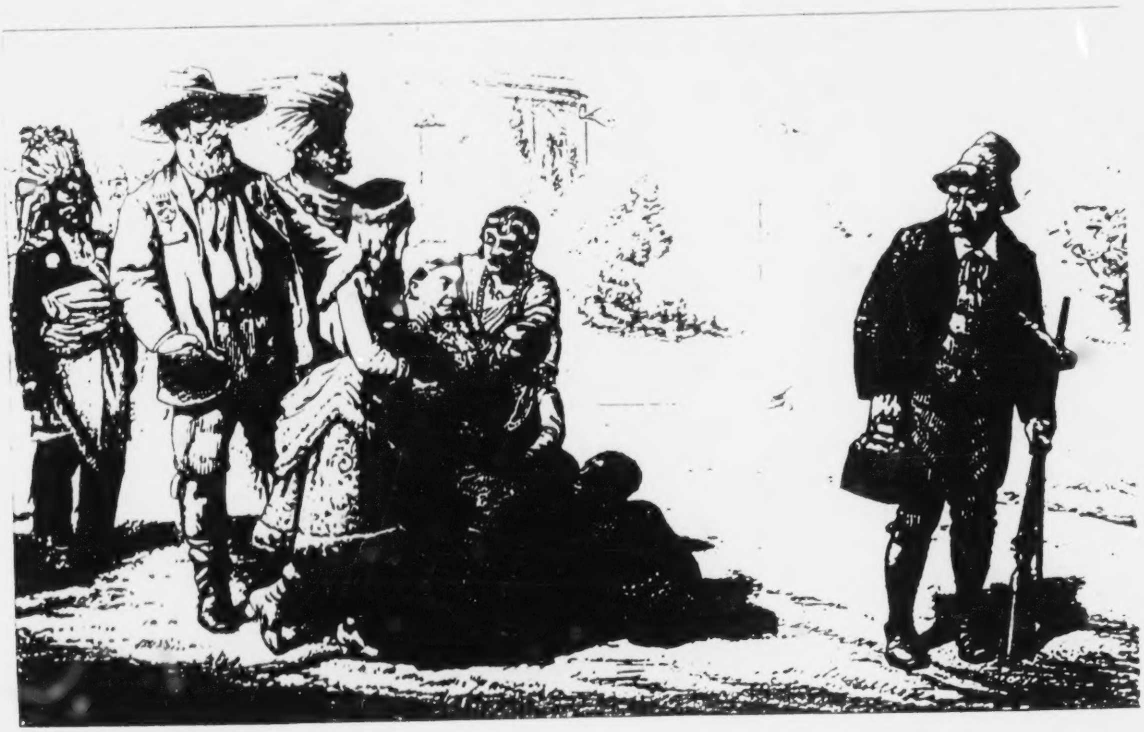

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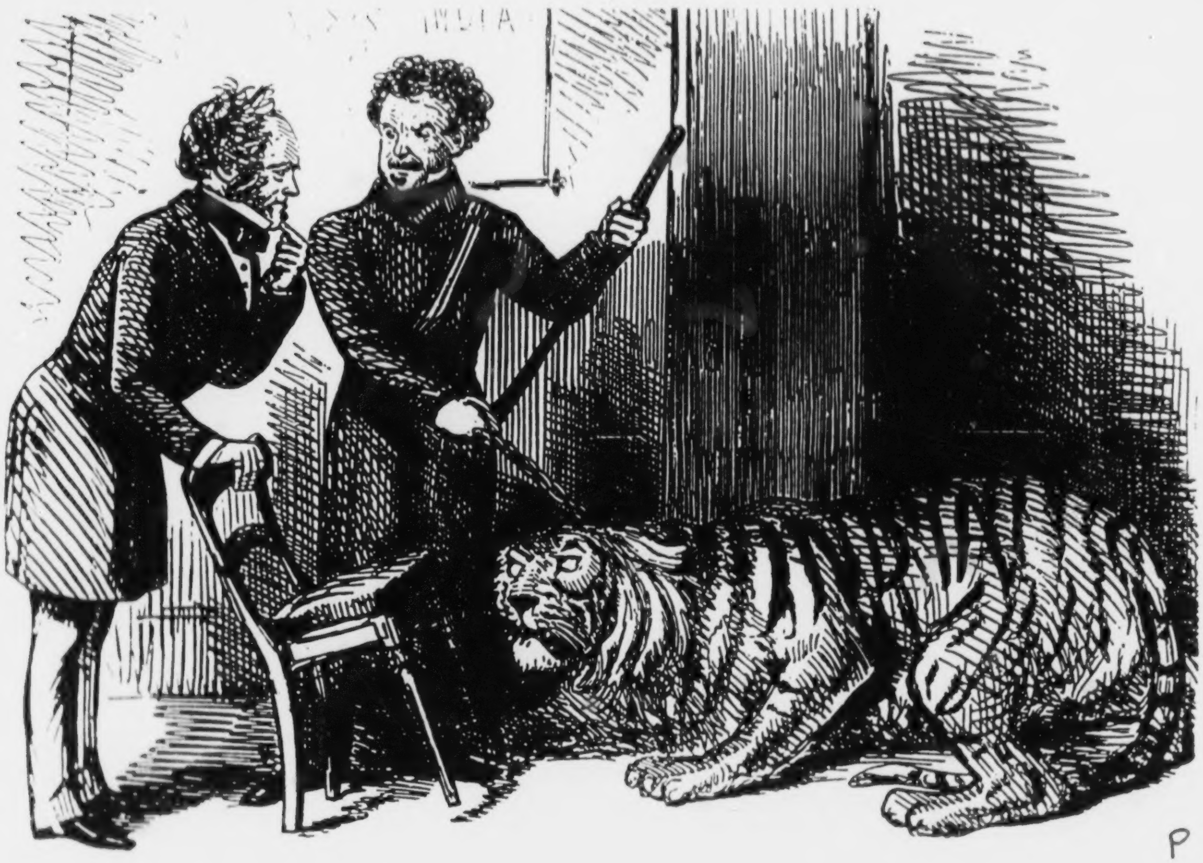
INDIA

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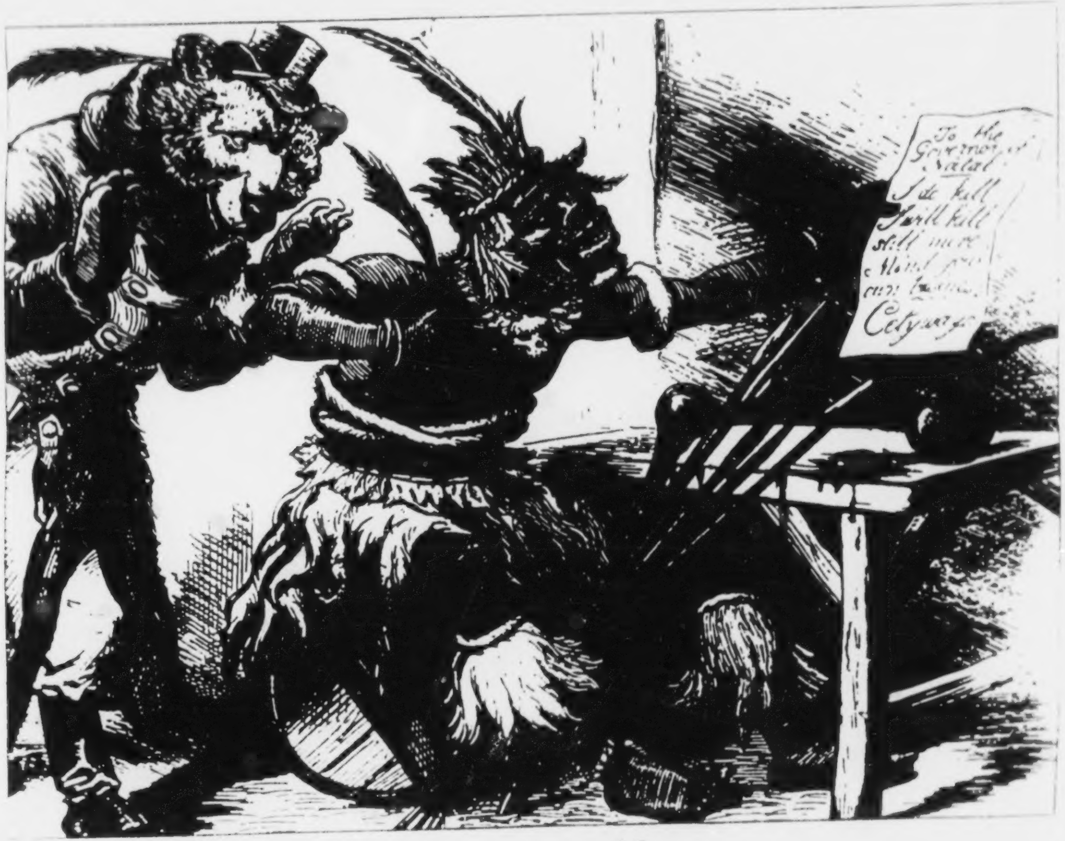
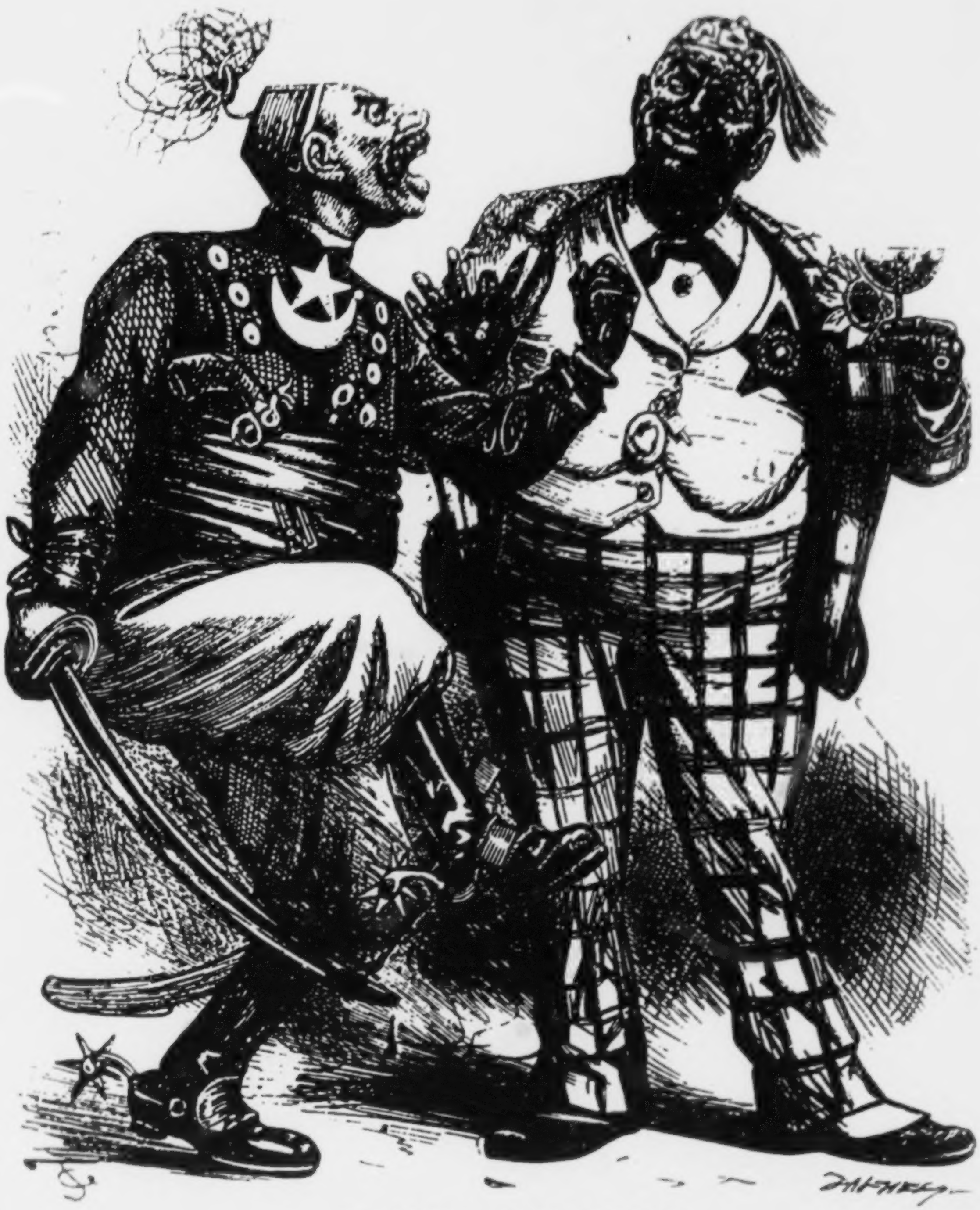

To the
Governor of
Natal
I de kill
I will kill
still more
Cetywayo

Q

FUN.—



ARABI'S WAR-DANCE.

Cetewayo.—"YAH! YAH!—DAT BERY PRITTY; BUT YOU GIT MASSA BULL TAKE YOU PRIS'NER—DAT PAY DE BEST OF ALL."

6

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47.

A. "Bog Trotters" is a long-standing English term for Irish peasants. They are shown here as near imbeciles, frolicking over the countryside.

B. "The Irish Ogre" about to devour the peasants is Daniel O'Connell, "The Liberator". He led the peaceful struggle for Catholic emancipation.

C. "The Pig and the Peer". During the Famine thousands the Irish peasants were evicted to make way for grazing animals that could "pay rent".

D. "The workingman's burden" shows the Irish peasant carrying his Famine relief money while riding on the back of the English laborer who paid the tax. No cartoons showed Irish peasants carrying English landlords.

E. "Two Forces" shows "classical" Britain using the sword of law to protect Ireland (Hibernia) from the anarchy of land reform.

F. "The Irish Frankenstein" capitalized on Mary Shelley's popular novel to depict the Irish as savage, inhuman monsters.

G. "The Irish Tempest" turns the Irishman into a subhuman monster. Britain is Prospero, the wise magician, who again protects the cowering Hibernia.

H. Here the Irish are shown as violent, obese, wasteful, drug-addicted monkeys. John Bull (Britain) shows Uncle Sam he will clean house.

I. "Equal Burdens" Caricature of the happy slave meets the caricature of the belligerent Irishman. Irish emigrants were called "White Negroes".

J. "American Gold" shows the Irish working in America, while the Irish in Ireland sit among their children and pigs, drinking and waiting for gold. "No Irish need Apply" signs were common in the U.S.

K. "The Day We Celebrate" by American cartoonist Thomas Nast, shows the Irish on Saint Patrick's Day as drunken, violent apes.

L. "Uncle Sam's Lodging House" depicts the belligerent Irishman as the only new emigrant raising hell and disrupting good order with unjust demands.

M. "Scientific Racism" as depicted in American magazine *Harper's Weekly*. The Irish share similar features with the Negro, and should be extinct!

N. This British cartoon shows backward Chinese resisting "Progress", only ten years after Britain forced them to accept illegal opium trafficking.

O. "Ungrateful Paddy" shows the Irish as the only member of the Imperial Family who refuse the blessings of British colonial rule.

P. "But how about keeping the brute?" shows conquered India in chains.

Q. "I do kill, I will kill" A British cartoon attacks the Zulu leader, Cetshwayo. The Russian bear is shown inciting him to violence.

R. Caricatures of Zulu and Arab leaders who are resisting colonial rule.

Irish Famine
Unit II
Activity 2

OUT OF AFRICA, OUT OF IRELAND

W.E.B. Du Bois, founder of the NAACP, and the preeminent historian on slavery in the Americas, wrote: "Any attempt to consider the attitude of the English colonies toward the African slave-trade must be prefaced by a word as to the attitude of England herself and the development of the trade in her hands."

Du Bois gives us a logical starting place for discussing racism and the legacy of slavery in America: it begins with the "Mother Country's" dominant role in the Atlantic slave trade. Before all white Europeans are lumped together with the British as colonists and slave keepers, let us consider Britain's treatment of the Irish and the Africans, and the many parallels of subjugation and enslavement to be drawn.

Britain first entered the slave trade with the capture of 300 Negroes in 1562, and pursued it with religious zeal for three centuries. She introduced the first African slaves to Virginia on board a Dutch ship in 1619. In 1651 she fought two wars to wrest the slave trade from the Dutch.

In her book, Black Chronology from 4,000 B.C. to Abolition of the Slave Trade, Ellen Irene Diggs wrote: "The final terms of peace surrendered New Netherlands (Delaware, New Jersey and New York)to England and opened the way for England to become the world's greatest slave trader."

In 1662 the "Company of Royal Adventurers" was chartered by Charles II of England. The Royal Family, including the Queen Dowager and the Duke of York, contracted to supply the West Indies with 3,000 slaves annually. This company was later sold for 34,000 Pounds and replaced by the "Royal African Company" also chartered by King Charles II.

Diggs says that in 1655, "Oliver Cromwell, in his zeal for God and the slave trade", sent an expedition to seize Jamaica from Spain. It soon became Britain's West Indian base for the slave trade.

Six years earlier Oliver Cromwell and his 20,000 man army invaded Ireland. They killed the entire garrison of Drogheda and slaughtered all the townspeople. Afterwards, Cromwell said "I do not think thirty of the whole number escaped with their lives. Those that did are in safe custody for the Barbados."

Under Cromwell's policy known as "To Hell or Connaught" Irish landowners were driven off millions of acres of fertile land. Those found east of the river Shannon after May 1,1654, faced the death penalty or slavery in the West Indies. Cromwell rewarded his soldiers and loyal Scottish Presbyterians by "planting" them on large estates. The British set up similar "plantations" in Barbados, St. Kitts and Trinidad. The demand for labor on these distant plantations prompted mass kidnappings in Ireland. A pamphlet published in 1660 accused the British of sending soldiers to grab any Irish people they could in order to sell them to Barbados for profit:

"It was the usual practice with Colonel Strubber, Governor of Galway, and other commanders in the said country, to take people out of their beds at night and sell them for slaves to the Indies, and by computations sold out of the said country about a thousand souls."

In Black Folk Then and Now, Du Bois concurs: "Even young Irish peasants were hunted down as men hunt down game, and were forcibly put aboard ship, and sold to plantations in Barbados".

According to Peter Berresford Ellis in To Hell or Connaught, soldiers commanded by Henry Cromwell, Oliver's son, seized a thousand "Irish wenches" to sell to Barbados. Henry justified the action by saying, "Although we must use force in taking them up, it is so much for their own good and likely to be of so great an advantage to the public." He also suggested that 2,000 Irish boys of 12 to 14 years of age could be seized for the same purpose: "Who knows but it might be a means to make them Englishmen."

In 1667 Parliament passed the "Act to regulate Negroes on British Plantations." Punishments included a severe whipping for striking a Christian. For the second offense: branding on the face with a hot iron. There was no punishment for "inadvertently" whipping a slave to death.

Between 1680 and 1688 the English African Company sent 249 ships to Africa and shipped approximately 60,000 Black slaves. They "lost" 14,000 during the middle passage, and only delivered 46,000 to the New World.

Diggs points out that "Planters sometimes married white women servants to Blacks in order to transform these servants and their children into slaves." This was the case with "Irish Nell", a servant woman brought to Maryland and sold to a planter when her former owner returned to England. Whether her children by a Black slave husband were to be slave or free, occupied the courts of Maryland for a number of years. Petition was finally granted, and the children freed.

The "custom" of marrying white servants to Black slaves in order to produce slave offspring was legislated against in 1681. How many half Irish children became slaves through this custom? How many Black Americans have Irish ancestors because of it? If a servant is forced to mate with a slave in order to produce slave children for her slave master, is she not a slave?

In 1698 British Parliament acted under pressure and allowed private English merchants to participate in the slave trade. The statute declared the slave trade "highly Beneficial and Advantageous to this Kingdom, and to the Plantations and Colonies thereunto belonging," according to Du Bois.

English merchants immediately sought to exclude all other nations by securing a monopoly on the lucrative Spanish colonial slave trade. This was accomplished by the Assiento treaty of 1713. Spain granted England a monopoly on the Spanish slave trade for thirty years. England engaged to supply the Spanish colonies with "at least 144,000 slaves at the rate of 4,800 a year," and they greatly exceeded their quota, according to Du Bois. The kings of Spain and England were to receive one-fourth of the profits, and the Royal African Company was authorized to import as many slaves as they wished.

In Slavery: A World History, Milton Meltzer says, "Slave trading was no vulgar or wicked occupation that shut a man out from offce or honors. Engaged in the British slave trade were dukes, earls, lords, countesses, knights - and kings. The slaves of the Royal African Company were branded with initials D.Y. for the Duke of York"

The Church of England supported the slave trade as a means of converting "heathens," and the Bishop of Exeter held 655 slaves until he was compensated for them in 1833. Trader John Newton had prayers said twice a day on board his slave ship, saying he never knew "sweeter or more frequent hours of divine communion." Francis Drake's slave ship was the "Grace of God."

In the late 18th century English historian Arthur Young travelled widely in Ireland. He wrote, "A landlord in Ireland can scarcely invent an order which a laborer, servant, or cottier dares to refuse. He may punish with his cane or horsewhip with most perfect security. A poor man would have his bones broken if he offered to lift a hand in his own defense."

When the Irish rebelled in 1798, Britain shipped thousands of chained "traitors" to her penal colonies in Australia. Many Irish prisoners were convinced that the masters of these convict ships were under orders to starve and murder them by neglect on the outward voyage. In The Fatal Shore, Robert Hughes says, "They had reason to think so," and points to the 1802 arrival of the Hercules, with a 37 percent death rate among the political exiles. That same year, the Atlas II sailed from Cork, with 65 out of 181 "convicts" found dead on arrival. Irish sailors who mutinied to help their countrymen were flogged unmercifully, and "ironed" together with handcuffs, thumbscrews and slave leg bolts.

In Slavery and the Slave Trade, James Walvin writes: "In 1781 the British slave ship the Zong, unexpectedly delayed at sea and in danger of running short of supplies, simply dumped 132 slaves overboard in order to save the healthier slaves and on the understanding that such an action would be covered by the ship's insurance (not the case had the wretched slaves merely died)."

Africans who arrived in the West Indies were sometimes sold in advance to plantation owners, or an agent could be paid 15-20 percent for handling the sale. But most often the ship's captain was responsible for selling the slaves, and his method was the "scramble."

According to Meltzer, the slaves were marched through the town behind bagpipes and drawn up for inspection in the public square. "By agreement with the buyers, a fixed price was set for the four categories of slaves: man, woman, boy, girl. A day for the sale was advertised. When the hour came, a gun was fired, the door to the slave yard flung open, and a horde of purchasers rushed in, with all the ferocity of brutes....each buyer, bent on getting his pick of the pack, tried to encircle the largest number of slaves by means of a rope. The slaves, helpless, bewildered, terrified, were yanked about savagely, torn by one buyer from another." Already branded once by the trader, the slaves were branded a second time with their new owner's initials.

The last report of slave populations in the British West Indies was in 1834. K.W. Stetson in his "Quantitative Approach to Britain's American Slave Trade" documents them as follows: Barbados: 82,000, Jamaica: 324,000, Grenada: 23,600, St. Vincent: 22,300, Dominica: 14,200, Trinidad: 20,700, Tobago: 11,600, St. Lucia: 13,300, Virgin Islands: 5,100, Bahamas: 10,100, Bermuda: 4,000, British Honduras: 1,900.

One victim of the trade was a Ghana man, Ottobah Cugoano, who was kidnapped at 13 and taken to the British West Indies as a slave. Later he was brought to England and freed. He commented bitterly on the British:

"Is it not strange to think that they who ought to be considered as the most learned and civilized people in the world, that they should carry on a traffic of the most barbarous cruelty and injustice, and that many are become so dissolute as to think slavery, robbery and murder no crime?"

Britain also colonized many African countries, including: Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, Cameroons, Egypt, Zanzibar, N. Rhodesia, S. Rhodesia, Swaziland, Somalia, Tanganyika, Basutoland, Seychelles, Mauritius, Togoland, and South Africa (Transvaal, Orange River, Natal, Cape Colony).

There were slave uprisings in Jamaica in 1669, `72, `73, twice in 1678, `82, `85, `90, 1733, `34,'62, `65, `66, 1807, 1815 and 1824. The last rebellion was led by Samuel Sharpe. The British executed him along with all the other leaders of the revolt, but his action did lead to Britain abolishing slavery. In the 1830's the British government paid the West Indian slave owners 22 million Pounds as compensation for the loss of their slave property. The slaves were not compensated.

Walvin says, "The picture described here has been too charitable toward the slavers and does not fully underline the inhumanities endemic in the slave trade...the slave trade was an exercise in cruelty and inhumanity to a degree scarcely imaginable to modern readers."

In The Afriran Slave Trade, Basil Davidson says, The value of British income derived from the (slave) trade with the West Indies was said to be four times greater than the value of British incomes derived from trade with the rest of the world." *Diggs* says that the great profits from the trade "helped make possible the British Industrial Revolution". The tables from the Royal African Company indicate that between 1690 to 1807, they took 2,579,400 slaves out of Africa.

In 1845-52 over a million Irish people died of starvation and related diseases while enjoying the benefits of direct rule from London. The mortality rate was increased by the forced eviction of 500,000 souls. A million and a half more left Ireland, many suffering and dying onboard "coffin ships".

There are many parallels between the treatment received by the Irish and the Africans at the hands of the British, and undeniably, racism played a major role in both tragedies.

BRITISH RACISM: BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE FAMINE

Racism is an ancient scourge, and the two groups in conflict need not be of different colors or religions.

When one powerful group begins to see another people as apes, pigs, beasts, or as an inferior race of subhumans, a disaster is in the making. Any study of racist stereotyping should consider what the dominant group stands to gain. Racism usually begins with economics.

Massacres, the slave trade, and the theft of vast tracts of other people's land, have all been justified by claims of religious, cultural and racial superiority. Such myths often hide the harsh reality of exploitation and colonization.

Anti-Irish prejudice is a very old theme in English culture. The written record begins with Gerald of Wales, whose family was deeply involved in the Norman invasion of Ireland.

In his 12th-century History and Topography of Ireland Gerald wrote contemptuously of the people, portraying them as inferior to the Normans in every respect:

"They live on beasts only, and live like beasts. They have not progressed at all from the habits of pastoral living." He condemned their customs, dress, and "flowing hair and beards" as examples of their "barbarity". He also vilified the religious practices and marriage customs of the people:

"This is a filthy people, wallowing in vice. Of all peoples it is the least instructed in the rudiments of the faith. They do not yet pay tithes or first fruits or contract marriages. They do not avoid incest." (1.)

A SACRIFICE TO GOD"

Religion was often used to justify attacks on the Irish. In 1574, a colonial expedition to Ulster led by the Earl of Essex slaughtered the entire population of Rathlin Island, some 600 people. Edward Barkley, a member of the expedition, gave a graphic description of how Essex's men had driven the Irish from the plains into the woods, where they would freeze or die of hunger at the onset of winter. He concluded:

"How godly a deed it is to overthrow so wicked a race the world may judge: for my part I think there cannot be a greater sacrifice to God" (2.)

When the Irish resisted colonization, they were met with total war on soldiers and noncombatants alike. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, the military governor and half-brother of Sir Walter Raleigh, stated:

"I slew all those from time to time that did belong to, feed, accompany or maintain any outlaws or traitors; and after my first summoning of a castle or fort, if they would not presently yield it, I would not take it afterwards of their gift, but won it perforce - how many lives soever it cost; putting man, woman and child to the sword." (3.)

Thomas Churchyard, a pamphleteer who accompanied Gilbert to Munster, justified the killing of non-combatants on the grounds that they provided food for the rebels: "so that killing of them by the sword was the way to kill the men of war by famine." Churchyard described Sir Gilbert's methods:

EARLY TERRORISM

"That the heads of all those (of what sort soever they were) which were killed in the day, should be cut off from their bodies and brought to the place where he encamped at night, and should there be laid on the ground by each side of the way leading into his own tent so that none could come into his tent for any cause but commonly must pass through a lane of heads which were used ad terrorem, the dead feeling nothing the more pains thereby; and yet did it bring great terror to the people when they saw the heads of their dead fathers, brothers, children, kinsfolk and friends, lie on the ground before their faces, as they came to speak with the said colonel" (4.)

"BEASTLY BEHAVIOR"

The various justifications for colonization were brought together and elaborated by Edmund Spenser, the poet and author of The Faerie Queene. In his book, A View of the State of Ireland, published in 1596, Spenser wrote:

"Marry those be the most barbaric and loathy conditions of any people (I think) under heaven...They do use all the beastly behaviour that may be, they oppress all men, they spoil as well the subject, as the enemy; they steal, they are cruel and bloody, full of revenge, and delighting in deadly execution, licentious, swearers and blasphemers, common ravishers of women, and murderers of children." (5.)

In 1610, A New Description of Ireland was published. Its author, Barnaby Rich wrote:

"The time hath been, when they lived like Barbarians, in woods, in bogs, and in desolate places, without politic law, or civil government, neither embracing religion, law or mutual love. That which is hateful to all the world besides is only beloved and embraced by the Irish, I mean civil wars and domestic dissensions .... the Cannibals, devourers of men's flesh, do learn to be fierce amongst themselves, but the Irish, without all respect, are even more cruel to their neighbors." (6.)

"GLORY TO GOD ALONE"

On his arrival in Dublin in 1649, Cromwell said: "By God's divine providence" he and his troops would "carry on the great work against the barbarous and bloodthirsty Irish..." After his army laid siege to the town of Drogheda, and killed the entire garrison, he wrote:

"It hath pleased God to bless our endeavors in Drogheda...The enemy were about 3,000 strong in the town...I do not think 30 of the whole number escaped with their lives. Those that did are in safe custody for the Barbados...I wish that all honest hearts may give the glory of this to God alone, to whom indeed the praise of this mercy belongs." Cromwell proceeded to Wexford where he slaughtered 2,000 more. (7.)

The English poet John Milton wrote at this time: "God is decreeing some new and great period. What does He then but reveal himself...as his manner is, first to his Englishmen?" (8.)

NO PEOPLE MORE PREJUDICED

British contempt for the Irish was part of an increasing disdain for foreigners in general. The Swiss traveller de Saussure observed them in 1727:

"I do not think there is a people more prejudiced in its own favor than the British people, and they allow this to appear in their talk and manners. They look on foreigners in general with contempt, and think nothing is as well done elsewhere as in their own country." (9.)

A TRUE-BORN ENGLISHMAN

English writer Daniel Defoe, the author of Robinson Crusoe, lampooned the notion of English superiority in a poem, "A True-born Englishman". The preface began:

"The intent of the satire is pointed at the vanity of those who talk of their antiquity, and value themselves upon their pedigree, their ancient families, and being True-Born; whereas it is impossible we should be True-Born: and if we could, should have lost in the bargain."

Defoe then listed the diverse peoples who had settled in England: Romans, Gauls, Greeks, Lombards, Scots, Picts, Danes and "slaves of every nation", and concluded: "From this amphibious ill-born mob began that vain ill-natured thing, an Englishman." (10.)

RACISM AGAINST AFRICANS, INDIANS AND EGYPTIANS

The British denigrated the Africans in terms similar to those they used about the Irish, but even more defamatory. While the Irish were despised for their "inferior" brand of Christianity, the Africans were dismissed for not even being Christians, but "heathens." And African customs were represented as even more "barbaric" than the Irish.

In India, British rule was justified because the Indians were "heathans" and unfit to rule themselves. In 1813 Lord Hastings wrote:

"The Hindoo appears a being nearly limited to mere animal functions and even in them indifferent. Their proficiency and skill in the several lines of occupation to which they are restricted, are little more than the dexterity which any animal with similar conformation but with no higher intellect than a dog, an elephant or a monkey, might be supposed to be capable of attaining." (11.)

Lord Cromer, the British Governor of Egypt, wrote that, "Free institutions in the full sense of the term must for generations to come be wholly unsuitable to countries such as India and Egypt...it will probably never be possible to make a Western silk purse out of an Eastern sow's ear." (12.)

The 18th century British philosopher David Hume, who wrote contemptuously of the Irish, also maligned the Africans. In his essay, "Of National Characters" he wrote:

"I am apt to suspect that Negroes, and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white..." (13.)

In the British view of the world, the Irish occupied a position way below themselves, but just above the Africans. The two were often compared, as in these verses from the British magazine Punch in 1848:

"Six-foot Paddy, are you no bigger -
You whom cozening friars dish -
Mentally, than the poorest nigger
Grovelling before fetish?

You to Sambo I compare
Under superstition's rule
Prostrate like an abject fool." (14.)

In 1849, British historian Thomas Carlyle published "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question." Mr. Eric Williams, former Prime Minister of Trinidad, and a historian, called it "The most offensive document in the entire world literature on slavery and the West Indies." Carlyle argued that the recently emancipated slaves should be forced to work for the whites:

"Decidedly you will have to be servants to those who are born wiser than you, that are born lords of you; servants to the Whites, if they are (as what mortal can doubt they are?) born wiser than you." (15.)

Carlyle visited Ireland soon after the famine and filled his journal with tirades against what he called "this brawling unreasonable people". Ireland, he wrote, was a "human swinery", "an abomination of desolation" and "a black howling Babel of superstitious savages". (16.)

IRISH CHIMPANZEES

In the 1860s, the debate among scientists about the relationship of humans to animals prompted British racists to make frequent comparisons between Irish people, Black people and apes. The Cambridge historian Charles Kingsley wrote to his wife from Ireland in 1860:

"I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country...to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black one would not see it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours." (17.)

"THE MISSING LINK"

In 1860 the first live adult gorilla arrived at the London Zoo just after Charles Darwin's Origin of the Species had been published. Victorians flocked to see it and debate the relationship of humans to animals. In 1862 the British magazine Punch published "The Missing Link" a satire attacking Irish immigrants:

"A gulf certainly, does appear to yawn between the Gorilla and the Negro. The woods and wilds of Africa do not exhibit an example of any intermediate animal. But in this, as in many other cases, philosophers go vainly searching abroad for that which they could readily find if they sought for it at home. A creature manifestly between the Gorilla and the Negro is to be met with in some of the lowest districts of London and Liverpool by adventurous explorers. It comes from Ireland, whence it has contrived to migrate; it belongs in fact to a tribe of Irish savages: the lowest species of Irish Yahoo. When conversing with its kind it talks a sort of gibberish. It is, moreover, a climbing animal, and may sometimes be seen ascending a ladder ladden with a hod of bricks." (18.)

The British historian Edward Freeman visited the United States in 1881. His obituary states that "he gloried in the Germanic origin of the English nation." On his return from America, he wrote:

"This would be a grand land if only every Irishman would kill a Negro, and be hanged for it. I find this sentiment generally approved - sometimes with the qualification that they want Irish and Negroes for servants, not being able to get any other." (19.)

"SCIENTIFIC" RACISM

Although their empire was acquired by military force and a divide and conquer strategy, the British attributed their success to Anglo-Saxon superiority. This old idea was brought up to date through pseudo-scientific theories of race.

Nineteenth century theorists divided humanity into "races" on the basis of external physical features. These "races" were said to have inherited differences not only of physique, but also of character. These "differnces" allowed the races to be placed in a heirarchy. Needless to say, the Teutons, who included the Anglo-Saxons, were placed at the top. Black people, especially "Hottentots" were at the bottom, with Celts (Irish) and Jews somewhere in between.

Anthropologists went around measuring people's skulls, and assigning them to different "races" on the basis of such factors as how far their jaws protruded. Celts and others were said to have more "primitive" features than Anglo-Saxons.

The physician John Beddoe invented the "index of nigrescence" a formula to identify the racial components of a given people. The Anglo-Saxon's "refined" features also came with a "superior" character. They were said to be industrious, thoughtful, clean, law-abiding and emotionally restrained, while the characters of the various colonized peoples were said to be the very opposite.

In 1850 the anatomist Robert Knox described the Celtic character as "Furious fanaticism; a love of war and disorder; a hatred for order and patient industry; no accumulative habits; restless; treacherous and uncertain: look to Ireland..." He drew the following conclusion:

"As a Saxon, I abhor all dynasties, monarchies and bayonet governments, but this latter seems to be the only one suitable for the Celtic man." (20.)

SUBJECTION AS A CONDITION FOR ADVANCEMENT

In 1862, the British historian Lord Acton wrote:

"The Celts are not among the progressive, initiative races, but among those which supply the materials rather than the impulse of history...The Persians, the Greeks, the Romans and the Teutons are the only makers of history, the only authors of advancement." He concluded: "Subjection to a people of a higher capacity for government is of itself no misfortune; and it is to most countries the condition of their political advancement." (21.)

In 1886 Lord Salisbury opposed Home Rule for Ireland with these words: "You would not confide free representative institutions to the Hottentots, for instance." Self government was only for people of the "Teutonic race." (22.)

"THE WILD IRISH"

Another proponent of the theory of Anglo-Saxon racial supremacy was James Anthony Froude, a professor of history at Oxford. He described the Irish country folk as "more like squalid apes than human beings." He depicted the Irish as "unstable as water", while the English stood for order and self-control. Only "efficient military despotism" could succeed in Ireland, he wrote, because the "wild Irish" understood only force.

"THOSE WHO ARE WISER"

Froude considered Negroes, like the Irish, to be an inferior race. He wrote: "Nature has made us unequal, and Acts of Parliament cannot make us equal. Some must lead and some must follow, and the question is only of degree and kind...Slavery is gone...but it will be an ill day for mankind if no one is compelled any more to obey those who are wiser than himself..." (23.)

Toward the end of her 1984 book, Nothing But the Same Old Story': The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism, Liz Curtis wrote:

"A gigantic exercise in self-delusion has helped to preserve English pride and self-regard down the centuries. Actions taken for reasons of political and economic expediency have been presented as if altruism were the sole motive. Atrocities of all kinds - from Cromwell's massacre at Drogheda, to the slave trade, to the appropriation of vast tracts of other people's countries - have been justified by claims of religious, cultural and racial superiority. These myths have served the British ruling class well over the centuries, clouding the harsh reality of exploitation and colonization."

That reality is best described by Jonathan Swift in Gulliver's Travels:

"A crew of pirates are driven by a storm they know not whither, at length a boy discovers land from the topmast, they go on shore to rob and plunder; they see an harmless people, are entertained with kindness, they give the country a new name, they take formal possession of it for the King, they set up a rotten plank or a stone for a memorial, they murder two or three dozen of the natives, bring away a couple of more by force for a sample, return home and get their pardon. Here commences a new dominion acquired with a title by divine right. Ships are sent with the first opportunity, the natives driven out or destroyed, their princes tortured to discover their gold; a free license given to all acts of inhumanity and lust, the earth reeking with the blood of its inhabitants: and this execrable crew of butchers employed in so pious an expedition, is a modern colony sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous people."

QUESTIONS

How were racism and religion used by the British to justify the economic exploitation of Ireland?

Why is it necessary to examine racism against the Irish in the context of British racism against a variety of peoples?

Given that radio and television did not exist during the Irish Famine, a few British Ministers and powerful newspapers could have used racism, religion and propaganda to control British public opinion about Ireland. How could such a tragedy happen today, in the age of mass communication?

How is Britain's role in the slave trade relevant to a study of anti-Irish racism?

FOOTNOTES

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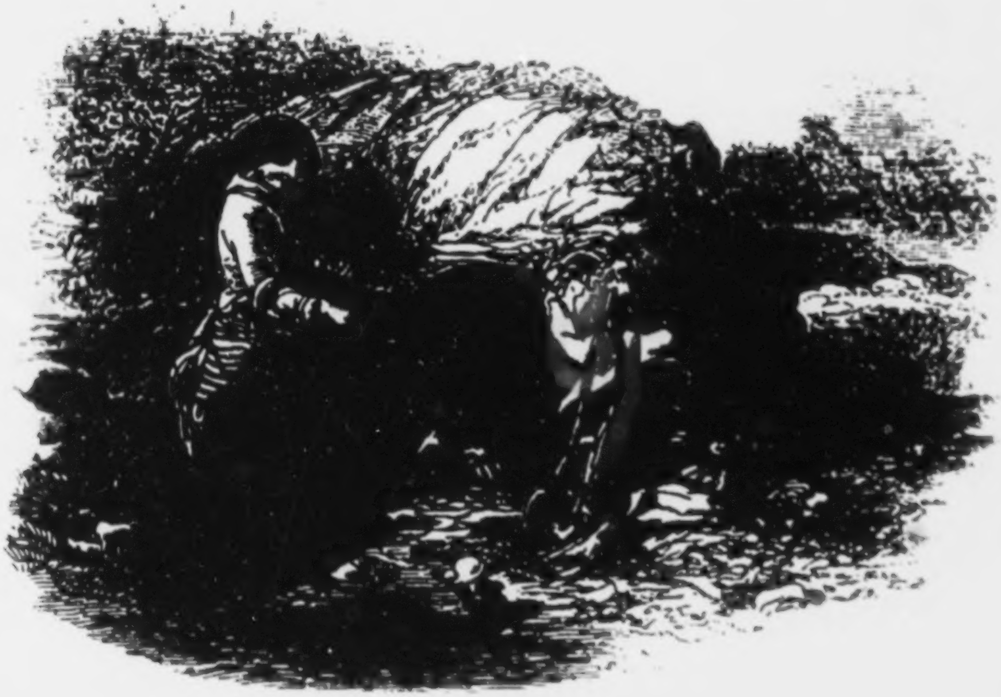
Irish Famine
Unit III

Mass Eviction During Famine



Unit III - Mass Eviction During Famine

ADDITIONAL, UNIT GOALS

PENFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

1.

The student will determine what role mass eviction played in exacerbating the condition of the poor during the Great Famine.

TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A.

Students will learn the extent of the mass evictions, their causes and detrimental effects.

Activity 1. Students will read "Mass Eviction During Famine", a compilation of excerpts from Famine histories, and a Document from The Irish Famine by Peter Gray. Students will answer questions following the readings and discuss issues raised.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL/RESOURCES

Gray, Peter, The Irish Famine, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1995.

"Mass Evictions During Famine" (see footnotes for sources)

Activity 1

MASS EVICTIONS DURING FAMINE

Mass evictions or "clearances" will forever be associated with the Irish Famine. "It has been estimated that, excluding peaceable surrenders, over a quarter of a million people were evicted between 1849 and 1854. The total number of people who had to leave their holdings in the period is likely to be around half a million and 200,000 small holdings were obliterated" (1)

Under a law imposed in 1847, called the "Gregory Clause", no tenant holding more than a quarter acre of land was eligible for public assistance. To become eligible, the tenant had to surrender his holding to his landlord. Some tenants sent their children to the workhouse as orphans so they could keep their land and still have their children fed.

Other tenants surrendered their land, but tried to remain living in the house; however, landlords would not tolerate it. "In many thousands of cases estate-clearing landlords and agents used physical force or heavy-handed pressure to bring about the destruction of cabins which they sought." (2)

Many others who sought entrance to the workhouses were required to return to their homes and uproot or level them. Others had their houses burned while they were away in the workhouse.

"When tenants were formally evicted, it was usually the practice of the landlord's bailiffs - his specially hired 'crowbar brigade' - to level or burn the affected dwellings there and then, as soon as the tenants effects had been removed, in the presence of a large party of soldiers or police who were likely to quell any thought of serious resistance." (3)

THE EVICTED

"These helpless creatures are not only unhoused, but often driven off the land, no one remaining on the lands being allowed to lodge or harbor them. Or they, perhaps, linger about the spot, and frame some temporary shelter out of materials of their old homes against a broken wall, or behind a ditch or fence, or in a bog-hole, places unfit for human habitations .... disease, together with the privations of other kinds which they endure, before long carry them off.

As soon as one horde of houseless and all but naked paupers are dead, or provided for in the workhouse, another wholesale eviction doubles the number, who in their turn pass through the same ordeal of wandering from house to house, or burrowing in bogs or behind ditches, till broken down by privation and exposure to the elements, they seek the workhouse, or die by the roadside." (4)

"There were hoards of poor on the roads every day. The Catholics who could gave some little they had to these, a saucer of oatmeal, a handful of potatoes, a drink of milk or a little bottle of sweet-milk to carry away with them. It was not unusual to see a woman with two, three or four children half-naked, come in begging for alms, and often several of these groups in one day, men too. If the men got work they worked for little or nothing and when they were no longer needed they took to the road again. These wandering groups had no homes and no shelter for the night. They slept in the barns of those that had barns on an armful of straw with a sack or sack or some such thing to cover them." (5)

BRITISH GOVERNMENT & EVICTIONS

When there was widespread criticism in the newspaper over the evictions, Lord Broughman made a speech on March 23rd, 1846 in the House of Lords. He said:

"Undoubtedly it is the landlord's right to do as he pleases, and if he abstained he conferred a favor and was doing an act of kindness. If, on the other hand, he choose to stand on his right, the tenants must be taught by the strong arm of the law that they had no power to oppose or resist...property would be valueless and capital would no longer be invested in cultivation of the land if it were not acknowledged that it was the landlord's undoubted and most sacred right to deal with his property as he wished." (6)

Even when tenants were evicted in the dead of winter and died of exposure, the British Home Secretary, Sir George Grey, "rejected the notion that house-destroying landlords were open to any criminal proceedings on the part of the government." (7)

British Parliament passed a law reducing the notice given to people before they were evicted to 48 hours. The law also made it a misdemeanor to demolish a dwelling while the tenants were inside. As a grand gesture of goodwill, the law prohibited evictions on Christmas day and Good Friday.

LANDLORDS

Irish Poor Law made landlords responsible for relief of the poor on the smallest properties - those valued at 4 Pounds or less. This gave landlords a strong incentive to rid themselves of tenants who were in that category and unable to pay rent. They did this by evicting the tenants or by paying for the tenants to emigrate on the "coffin ships"

On January 23rd, 1846, Mr. Todhunter, a member of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends wrote: "It is evident that some landlords, forgetful of the claims of humanity and regardless of the Public Welfare, are availing themselves of the present calamity to effect a wholesale clearance of their estates." (8)

One landlord, the Earl of Lucan, evicted 187 families (913 people) in 18 months. A follow-up report by a Galway newspaper found that of the 913 evicted, 478 were receiving public relief, 170 had emigrated, and 265 were dead or left to shift from place to place. It is not known how many of the 170 who emigrated died at disembarcation centers or aboard "coffin ships".

The Limerick and Clare Examiner protested that even "the good landlords are going to the bad, and the bad are going to the worst extremities of cruelty and tyranny, while both are suffered by a truckling (submissive) and heartless government to make a wilderness of the country and a waste of human life." (9)

"I must say the landlords were not all alike. My grandfather, God rest his soul, went to pay part of his rent to his landlord, a Bantry man. 'Feed your family first, then give me what you can afford when times get better,' he told him." (10)

"The fact that our people escaped so well was owed to the landlord of the time, Mr. Cronin Coltsman. He earned the everlasting gratitude of the people. When he saw the awful plight of his tenants, he caused a mill to be built half a mile below our village .... When the mill was ready the landlord bought Indian meal in Cork City and got his tenants to go with their horses and bring the meal free of charge to the mill where, when it was ground, everyone who needed it got a measure or scoop of meal for each one of their family. (11)

"The landlords were not always to be blamed when evictions took place. Middle-men and well-to-do farmers were very often responsible. 'Grabbing' was quite common in the district. Farmers who had more money to spare were only too ready to approach the landlord or his agent and offer to pay back rent on a neighboring farm on the condition that they would be given possession. Sometimes landlords were asked to dispossess tenants from holdings, the rents of which were fully paid up." (12)

"A MODEST PROPOSAL"

In 1729, Jonathan Swift, the Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, wrote a macabre satire, "A Modest Proposal" in which he tried to draw attention to the horrific conditions of the Irish poor. The pamphlet put forward a scheme for solving Ireland's economic problems by fattening up the children of the poor and selling them as meat:

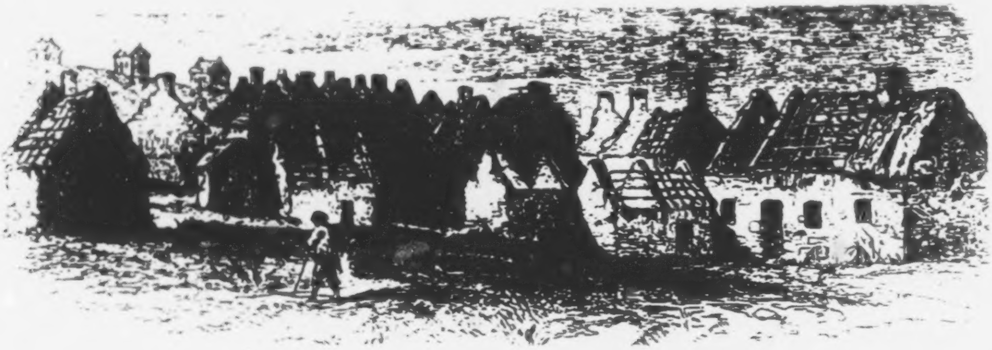
"A young healthy child, well nursed, is at a year old, a most delicious, nourishing and wholesome food; whether stewed, roasted, baked or boiled; and I make no doubt, that it will equally serve in fricassee or ragout... I grant that this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords; who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have best title to the children."

CONCLUSIONS

University of Wisconsin History Professor James S. Donnelly, the author of Landlord and Tenant in 19th-Century Ireland, wrote: "I would draw the following broad conclusion: at a fairly early stage of the Great Famine the government's abject failure to stop or even slow down the clearances (evictions) contributed in a major way to enshrining the idea of English state-sponsored genocide in Irish popular mind.

Or perhaps one should say in the Irish mind, for this was a notion that appealed to many educated and discriminating men and women, and not only to the revolutionary minority..." (13)

Dennis Clark, author of Erin's Heirs and The Irish in Philadelphia, wrote that the British government's insistence on "the absolute rights of landlords" to evict farmers and their families so they could raise cattle and sheep, was "a process as close to 'ethnic cleansing' as any Balkan war ever enacted." (14)



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Unit III
Activity 1

Document from
The Irish Famine
by Peter Gray

DOCUMENTS 141

James Hack Tuke, a Quaker from York, condemned the mass evictions in Connacht.

"The landlords of Mayo, as well as of many other portions of Connaught, as a class, (there are many noble exceptions who feel and see the impolicy and evil of such proceedings,) are pursuing a course which cannot fail to add to the universal wretchedness and poverty which exist.

The corn crops, bountiful as they may be, are not sufficient to meet the landlords' claim for rent and arrears contracted during the last two years of famine, and it is at least not unnatural for the tenant to be unwilling to give up that, without which he must certainly perish. In every direction, the agents of the landlords, armed with the full powers of the law, are at work everywhere. One sees the driver or bailiff "canting" the small patches of oats or potatoes or keepers, whose extortionate charges must be paid by the unfortunate tenant, placed over the crop. Even the produce of seed, distributed through the agency of benevolent associations, has been totally swept away.

To add to the universal distress caused by this system of seizure, eviction is in many cases practiced, and not a few of the roofless dwellings which meet the eye, have been destroyed at the instance of the landlords, after turning adrift the miserable inmates; and this even at a time like the present, when the charity of the whole world has been turned towards the relief of this starving peasantry.

Whilst upon the island of Achill, I saw a memorable instance of this mode of proceeding, at the wretched fishing village of Kiel. Here, a few days previous to my visit, a driver of Sir R. O'Donnells, whose property it is, had ejected some twenty families, making, as I was informed, with a previous recent eviction, about forty. A crowd of these miserable ejected creatures collected around us, bewailing, with bitter lamentations, their hard fate.

One old grey-headed man came tottering up to us, bearing in his arms his bedridden wife, and putting her down at our feet, pointed, in silent agony to her, and then to his roofless dwelling, the charred timbers of which were scattered in all directions around. This man said he owed little more than one year's rent, and had lived in the village, which had been the home of his forefathers, all his life.

Another man, with five motherless children, had been expelled, and their "boiling-pot" sold for 3shilling. Another family, consisting of a widow and four young children, had their only earthly possession "a little sheep," seized, and sold for 5 shillings!

But it is needless to multiply cases; instances sufficient have been given to show the hardships and misery inflicted. From this village alone, at least one hundred and fifty persons had been evicted, owing from half a year's to a year and a half's rent. The whole of their effects, even the miserable furniture of these wretched cabins seized and sold to satisfy the claims of the nominal owner of Achill (Island).

What prospects are there for these miserable outcasts? Death indeed must be the portion of some, for their neighbors, hardly richer than themselves, were principally subsisting upon turnip tops; whilst the poorhouse of the union of Westport is nearly forty miles distant. Turnips taken, can we say stolen, from the fields, as they wearily walked thither, would be their only chance of support."

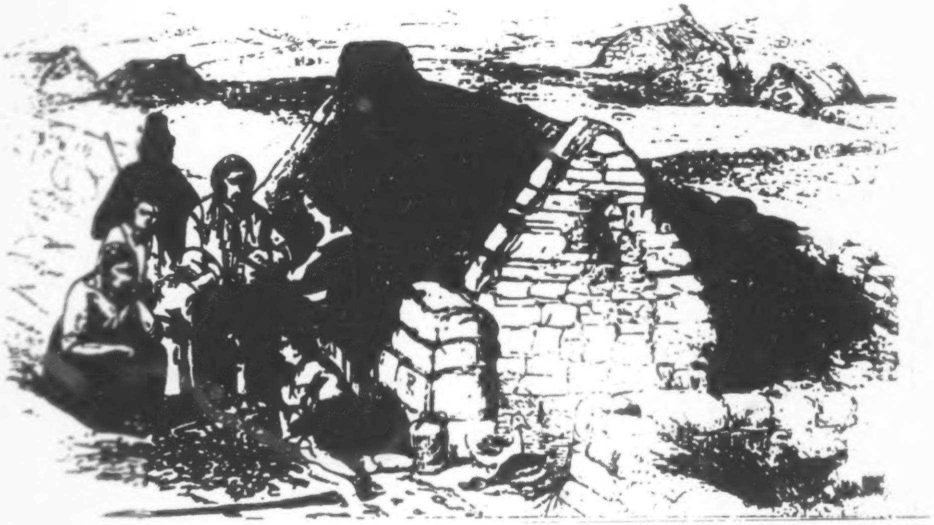
QUESTIONS

How did the estimated half a million evictions contribute to the death rate during the Great Famine?

What were the living conditions like for those evicted?

Were there any tenant rights under British law?

In what way did the Poor Law contribute to the death rate among the poor?



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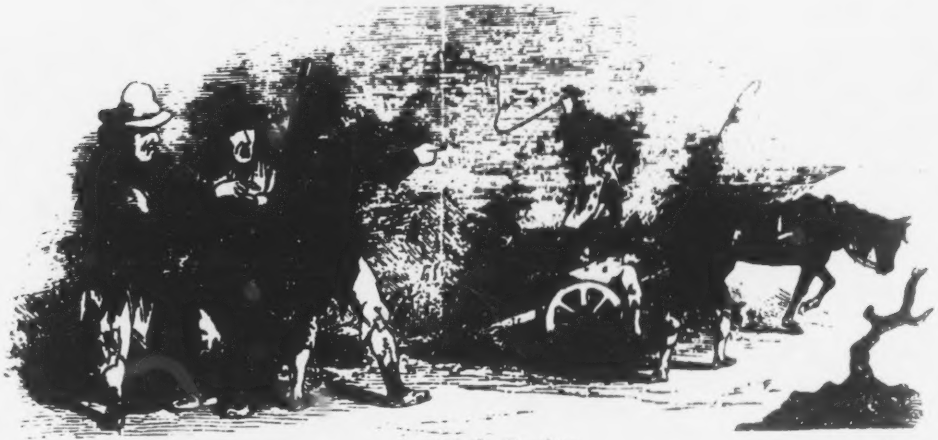
IV
Mortality Rates and "The Horror"



Irish Famine
Unit IV

UNIT IV - Mortality Rates and "The Horror"

ADDITIONAL UNIT GOALS:

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

1.
The student will examine the levels of mortality experienced in Ireland during the Great Famine, and humanize numbers and statistics.

TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A.
Students will learn that the range of mortality estimates is from 500,000 to 1,500,000 or more, with a consensus mortality estimate of 1,000,000 deaths.

Activity 1. Students will read excerpts from This Great Calamity (p. 167-169), and The Great Hunger (p. 411-412), answer questions following the readings and discuss the issues raised.

Activity 2. Have students go to the library and use the Statistical Abstract of the United States to determine the population of the United States, and the number of deaths per year from automobile accidents.

What percentage of the population are killed in such accidents each year?

How does that percentage compare with the percent killed in Ireland during the Great Famine?

Activity 3. Students will read the personal accounts contained in "Famine Scenes (The Horror)" and compare their reactions to ones they experienced reading the statistical accounts in Activity 1. Students will answer questions following the reading.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL/RESOURCES

Kinnealy, Christine, This Great Calamity; The Irish Famine 1845-52, Roberts Rinehart Publishers, Boulder Colorado, 1995

Woodham-Smith, Cecil, The Great Hunger; Ireland 1845-1849 Penguin Books, London, England, 1991. First printing: 1962.

Irish Famine
Unit IV
Activity 1

This Great Calamity
THE IRISH FAMINE
1845-52
By Christine Kinealy

Mortality

"The exact number of people who died during the Famine years (1845-51) is not known. In the first year of distress, no one was believed to have died from want; however, by the end of 1846, this had changed dramatically. In April 1847, an editorial in an Irish newspaper asked:

`What has become of all the vast quantity of food which has been thrown into Ireland? Where are the effects which it might have been expected to produce? How are the millions of pounds of money voted and subscribed been used that the march of famine, instead of being saved, has apparently been quickened.'

By this stage, it was obvious that the various relief measures employed since the appearance of the second blight had failed. The most telling manifestation was the great increase in mortality in the winter of 1846-7.

In 1851, the Census Commissioners attempted to produce a table of mortality for each year since 1841, the date of the previous census. Their calculations were based on a combination of deaths recorded in institutions and recollections of individuals (civil registration of deaths was not introduced into Ireland until 1864). The statistics provided were flawed and probably under-estimated the level of mortality, particularly for the earlier years of the Famine: personal recollections are notoriously unreliable and such methods did not take into account whole families who disappeared either as a consequence of emigration or death. In the most distressed areas, therefore, the data is the most incomplete and the information was sometimes based on indirect evidence.

The table below, which was compiled by the Census Commissioners, does offer some insights into the fluctuations in mortality in these years. Because the rates of mortality were computed at the county level, with the exception of the larger towns, the disparities within each county cannot be measured and thus it is difficult to identify pockets of particularly severe distress. Local reports and increased numbers of local studies revealed a complex picture of local diversity, exposing pools of distress and excess mortality in parts of the midlands, whereas areas in the west of Ireland were little affected. Furthermore, excess mortality was evident even in some of the wealthiest parts of the country.

Table 14: Irish Mortality, 1842-50 [139]

Year	% of the Total Number of Deaths Occurring in Each Year
1842	5.1
1843	5.2
1844	5.6
1845	6.4
1846	9.1
1847	18.5
1848	15.4
1849	17.9
1850	12.2

The number of deaths during the Famine has variously been calculated as lying between half a million and one and a half million fatalities. The correct number probably lies in between. It is more generally accepted that in the region of one million people died during these years. Excess mortality as a result of the Famine, however, did not end in 1851. In addition to deaths, the Famine also contributed to a decrease in the birthrate, by contributing to a decline in the rate of marriage and in the level of fertility and fecundity. The number of deaths in Ireland in 1847 was double the number in the previous year. This increase in mortality affected all parts of Ireland. The high rates of mortality were not prolonged and some areas in Ulster and the east coast showed signs of recovery in 1848, which was maintained despite the reappearance of blight in the same year. By this time, the local economies were recovering from tile temporary industrial dislocation apparent in 1847. In parts of the west, however, mortality remained high and reached a second peak in 1849, a cholera epidemic providing the final, Fatal blow to an already vulnerable people.

Mortality was particularly severe in the first three months of 1847, peaking in March and then starting a slow decline after April. This peak coincided with public works being used as the main vehicle for relief and is a clear testament to the Failure of this system. The continuing high

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mortality of April and May 1847 coincides with the period during which public works were being wound down, even though their replacement was not always available. After May, the level of mortality began to decrease significantly, although it remained higher than its pre-Famine levels. This reduction is generally associated with the opening of soup kitchens in the summer of 1847 and the relatively generous provision of relief. The impact of mortality was most severe among the lowest economic and social groups within Ireland-those who, lacking their own capital resources, depended on external assistance for relief. The most vulnerable individuals within this group were children under five, old people and pregnant and lactating women. Overall, however, women tended to he more resilient than men to the effects of the Famine.

At the end of March 1847, Lord George Bentinck, leader of the Troy opposition, questioned the government regarding the number of deaths in Ireland and accused the Whigs of attempting to conceal the truth. No official figures had been released to parliament, although he suspected that there were:

`... tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of deaths - they could not learn from the government how many, for there was one point about which the government were totally ignorant or which they concealed, which was the mortality which had occurred during their administration of Irish affairs.'

Bentinck continued by attacking an underlying economic philosophy of the government:

`They know the people have been dying by their thousands and I dare them to inquire what has been the number of those who have died through their mismanagement, by their principles of free trade. Yes, free trade in the lives of the Irish people.'"

Unit IV
Activity 1

THE GREAT HUNGER
IRELAND 1845-1849

CECIL WOODHAM-SMITH

PENGUIN BOOKS

How many people died in the famine will never precisely be known. It is almost certain that, owing to geographical difficulties and the unwillingness of the people to be registered, the census of 1841 gave a total smaller than the population in fact was. Officers engaged in relief work put the population as much as 25 per cent. higher; landlords distributing relief were horrified when providing, as they imagined, for 60 persons, to find more than 400 'start from the ground'.

In 184I the population of Ireland was given as 8,175,124; in 1851, after the famine, it had dropped to 6,552,385, and the Census Commissioners calculated that, at the normal rate of increase, the total should have been 9,018,799, so that a loss of at least 2.5 million persons had taken place. The figures available, however, must be regarded as giving only a rough indication; vital statistics are unobtainable, no record was kept of deaths, and very many persons must have died and been buried unknown, as the fever victims died and were buried in west Cork, as bodies, found lying dead on the road, were buried in ditches, and as the timid people of Erris perished unrecorded.

In the four provinces of Ireland the smallest loss of population was in Leinster, 15.5 per cent., then Ulster, 16 per cent., Connaught's loss was greatest, 28.6 per cent., and Munster lost 23.5 per cent. In some respect, death and clearance improved Ireland; between 1841 and 1851, nearly 360,000 mud huts disappeared, the greatest decrease being 81 per cent. in Ulster, which then included the distressed county of Donegal, followed by Connaught, with a decrease of 74 per cent., Muhster 69 per cent., and Leinster 62 per cent. Smallholdings under five acres were nearly halved, and holdings over fifteen acres doubled.

No advantage, however, was taken of the reduction of small tenants, agriculture was not improved, and in 1866 Isaac Butt wrote, 'Ireland has retrograded . . .' Between 1848 and 1864, however, thirteen million pounds was sent home by emigrants in America to bring relatives out, and it is part. of the famine tragedy that, because no adequate measures of reconstruction were undertaken, a steady drain of the best and most enterprising left Ireland, to enrich other countries.

The famine left hatred behind. Between Ireland and England the memory of what was done and endured has lain like a sword. Other famines followed, as other famines had gone before, but it is the terrible years of the Great Hunger which are remembered, and only just beginning to be forgiven.

Time brought retribution. By the outbreak of the second world war, Ireland was independent, and she would not fight on England's side. Liberty and England did not appear to the Irish to be synonymous, and Eire remained neutral. Many thousands of Irishmen from Eire volunteered, but the famous regiments of southern Ireland had ceased to exist, and the 'inexhaustible nursery of the finest soldiers' was no longer at England's service.

There was also a more direct payment. Along the west coast of Ireland, in Mayo especially, on remote Clare Island, and in the dunes above the Six Mile Strand are a number of graves of petty officers and able seamen of the British Navy and Merchant Service, representatives of many hundreds who were drowned off the coast of Ireland, because the Irish harbours were not open to British ships. From these innocents, in all probability ignorant of the past, who had never heard of failures of the potato, evictions, fever and starvation, was exacted part of the price for the famine.

Irish Famine
Unit IV
Activity 1

Questions:

Out of a pre-famine population of just over 8 million people, how many Irish died?

Given a normal rate of increase, what would have been the total population in Ireland in 1851?

Which groups were the most vulnerable to starvation? Why?

What is the "retribution" or "direct payment" for the Famine mentioned by Woodham-Smith?

Does she make the case that Ireland's neutrality in World War II was designed to punish England for the Great Famine?

Activity 3

FAMINE SCENES (THE HORROR)

"A cabin was seen closed one day a little out of town, when a man had the curiosity to open it, and in a dark corner he found a family of the father, mother, and two children, lying in close compact. The father was considerably decomposed; the mother, it appeared, had died last, and probably fastened the door, which was always the custom when all hope was extinguished, to get into the darkest corner and die, where passers-by could not see them. Such family scenes were quite common, and the cabin was generally pulled down upon them for a grave." (1.)

"Six men, beside Mr. Griffith, crossed with me in an open boat, and we landed, not buoyantly, upon a once pretty island. The first that called my attention was the death-like stillness - nothing of life was seen or heard, except occasionally a dog. These looked so unlike all others I had seen among the poor - I unwittingly said, "How can the dogs look so fat and shining here, where there is no food for the people?" The pilot turned to Mr. Griffith, not supposing that I heard him, and said, "Shall I tell her?"

That was enough: if anything were wanting to make the horrors of the famine complete, this supplied the deficiency." (2.)

"Going out one cold day in a bleak waste on the coast, I met a pitiful old man in hunger and tatters, with a child on his back, almost entirely naked, and to appearance in the last stages of starvation; whether his naked legs had been scratched, or whether the cold had affected them I knew not, but the blood was in small streams in different places, and the sight was a horrid one. The old man said he lived seven miles off, and was afraid the child would die in the cabin, with the two little children he had left starving, and he had come to get the bit of meal, as it was the day he heard food relief was being given out. The officer told him he had not time to enter his name in the book, and he was sent away in that condition. A penny or two was given him, for which he expressed the greatest gratitude.

The next Saturday we saw the old man creeping slowly in a bending posture upon the road. The old man looked up and recognized me. On inquiring where the child was, he said the three were left in the cabin, and had not taken a 'sup or a bit' since yesterday morning, and he was afraid some of them would be dead upon the hearth when he returned. He was so weak that he could not carry the child and had crept seven miles to get the meal. He was sent away again with a promise to wait till next Tuesday, and come and have his name on the books. This poor man had not a penny nor a mouthful of food, and he said tremulously, 'I must go home and die on the hearth with the hungry ones."' (3.)

"The deaths in my native place were many and horrible. The poor famine-stricken people were found by the wayside, emaciated corpses, partly green from eating docks (weeds) and nettles and partly blue from the cholera and dysentery." (4.)

"There was a girl who had her hands worn from scraping the stones of the strand for food, such as shaddy and all sorts of shellfish, and when she had the strand bare she was found lying dead." (5.)

"The children's appearance, though common to thousands of the same age in this region of the shadow of death, was indescribable. Their paleness was not that of common sickness...They did not look as if newly raised from the grave and to life before the blood had begun to fill their veins anew; but as if they had been thawed out of the ice, in which they had been imbedded until their blood had turned to water." (6.)

"We met flocks of wretched children going to school for the 'bit of bread', some crying with hunger, and some begging to get in without the penny which was required for their tuition. The poor emaciated creatures went weeping away, one said he had been looking for a penny all day yesterday, and could not get it." (7.)

DEATH FROM EATING FOOD

"So many had been starving for so long that when they were given food...the danger of death actually increased. The body could neither absorb nor assimilate so sudden an intake of nutrients it had been craving for so long...The heart especially could not withstand the added workload of a sudden increase in the body's metabolic rate." 'Carthy swallowed a little warm milk and died' was the simple statement of one man's death from starvation in Skibbereen. One man connected with the Quaker Society of Friends said, "If they get a full meal it kills them immediately." (8.)

"When the Indian meal came out, some of them were so desperate from starvation that they didn't wait for it to be cooked properly, they ate it almost raw and that brought on intestinal troubles that killed a lot of them that otherwise might have survived." (9.)

"The house was near the road and a pot of stirabout was kept for any starving person who passed the way. My mother Mary was a young girl at the time and alone in the house one day when a big giant of a fellow staggered in. He wolfed his share of stirabout and made for the door, but there was a tub of chopped raw cabbage and porridge for the pigs. He fell on his knees by the tub and devoured the stuff till she was in a fright, then he reeled out to the road and was found dead there a short time after." (10.)

"I heard my grandmother say that she knew fine people to be seen lying dead along the roads and in the fields. It seems they fell dead out of their standing and the dogs eating at them. They mustered up, she said, in bunches like, them that felt getting weak, and then went away to some place away out, and one done what they could for the other till they died." (11.)

There were so many deaths that they opened big trenches through the graveyards and when they were full of dead they filled them in. Most of those who died were children or old people. "It is estimated that three out of every five who *died* were under 10 years of age or over 60." (12.)

DEALING WITH THE DEAD

The problem of finding materials for coffins or transporting the corpses and digging graves for over a million dead, was made worse by the dire poverty and physical exhaustion caused by hunger and disease.

"A woman from the Teelin district of County Donegal, on the death of her little son, not having the wherewithal to get a coffin, put the child in the cradle, strapped the cradle on her back and carried it five miles to the nearest graveyard and buried it." (13.)

"The people had neither the material nor the strength to make coffins nor dig graves. When a person died they got a plank and tied the feet of the corpse to one end of it and the head to the other end, and the hands together, then two men took hold of it at each end and carried it to a bog nearby where the water was deep and threw it in." (14.)

"My father told me that he saw a man carrying his brother's corpse in a coffin on his back to Moybologue graveyard. He had no one to help him and he had to dig the grave and bury the corpse himself. He died in the hospital and people didn't like to attend the funeral because he died of fever, and they afraid they might take it. My father said it was the saddest sight he'd ever seen." (15.)

"They saw the man coming along the road - Scannlon was his name - and a load on his back. My grandmother asked him what he had there, and he said 'twas his wife that was dead and he was taking her to Leitrum graveyard to bury her. He had her sitting on a board fastened over his shoulders and she was dressed in her cloak and hood just as she'd be when she was alive. His little son was with him. My grandmother went into the house and brought them food and milk. Scannlon wouldn't take anything; he said it would overcome him and he wanted to have his wife buried before dark. The little boy drank the milk." (16.)

Questions:

Do these personal stories help to make individuals out of statistics?

Why did people die from eating food?

Why did the dead present such unusual problems for the living?

FOOTNOTES

1. Litton, Helen, The Irish. Famine;. An Illustrated History Wolfhound Press Ltd., Dublin, Ireland, 1994, P.40.

2. Ibid., p.38

3. Ibid., p.79

4. Poirteir, Cathal, Famine Echoes, Gill and Macmillan Ltd., Dublin, Ireland, 1995, p.90.

5. Ibid., p.88

6. Gray, Peter, The Irish Famine,. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1995. p.139

7. Ibid., p. 143

8. Gallagher, Michael & Thomas, Paddy's Lament. Harcourt Brace & Company, New York / London, 1982, p.104

9. Poirteir, p. 89

10. Ibid., p.92

11. Ibid., p.11

12. Ibid., p.182

13. Ibid., p.183

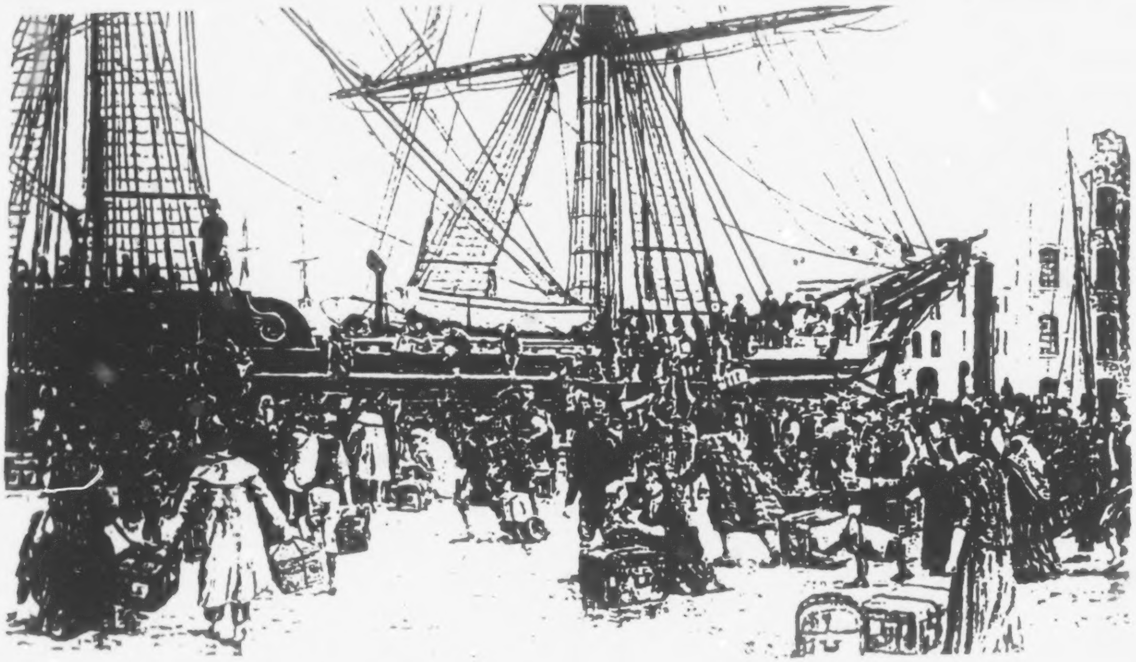
14. Ibid., p.185

15. Ibid.,

16. Gallagher, p.11

V

Emigration: Departure, Crossing and Arrival



ADDITIONAL UNIT GOALS:

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

I.
The student will be able to describe the conditions in Liverpool, where Famine emigrants disembarked, and explain the deaths on board the "coffin ships".

TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A.
Students will examine the problems faced by Famine victims before and during their transport to America.

Activity 1. Students will read excerpts from The Great Hunger, and The End of Hidden Ireland, and answer questions immediately following. Students will discuss the viewpoint of landlords, ship captains, and the public, as well as the hazards faced by the emigrants.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL/RESOURCES

Scally, Robert James, The End of Hidden Ireland: Rebellion, Famine, and Emigration, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, pp.212-215

Woodham-Smith, Cecil, The Great Hunger; Ireland 1845-1849 Penguin Books, London, England, 1991. First printing: 1962. pp.226-228

Objective 2.
The student will be able to describe the conditions at the quarantine station at Grosse Ile (Isle) Quebec, where the Famine emigrants landed.

TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A.
Examine two of the historical descriptions of Grosse Ile.

Activity 1.
Students will read excerpts from The Great Hunger and Robert Whyte's 1847 Famine Ship Diary, answer questions following the readings and discuss the issues raised.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL/RESOURCES

Mangan, James (Ed.), Robert Whyte's 1847 Famine Ship Diary Metclef Press, Dublin Ireland,
1994. pp.111-121

Woodham-Smith, Cecil, The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845-1849 Penguin Books, London, England, 1991. First printing: 1962. pp. 218-221

Irish Famine
Unit V
Activity 1

LEAVING FROM LIVERPOOL

The passage through the Liverpool funnel was also the most common experience of the famine emigrants. One might even say it was their first truly "national" experience. The sight of the exodus was concentrated and magnified in the few square miles of the waterfront where, in a sense, all of Ireland's townlands met for the first time and witnessed the commonality of their fate. Whatever the circumstances of their leaving home or their ultimate destination, the vast majority of emigrants were unmistakably linked by characteristics that identified them as one in the eyes of Liverpool if not yet in their own. Rags, disease, and the ravages of hunger were among the signs attached to them, as we have seen.

For Rushton's police, baggage was the telling sign. The health officers looked for symptoms of "Irish fever." Adult males of the most ordinary appearance in Ballykilcline were the ape-like "Milesian' brutes of Victorian caricature. Above all, the symbols of Irishness in Liverpool were the signs of a poverty so extreme that, when found in the heart of the empire, it was seen as a fall from civilization and likened to savagery.

In Liverpool, the poverty of the emigrants was visible in their bodies, in their rags, and malnutrition. Toothlessness, matted hair, body smells, and other missing vanities also set them apart. But, according to some observers Irish poverty could be distinguished from that of other paupers as something more than just a lack of cash, something as evident in their gait and demeanor as in their obvious need. "Passive," "resigned," "stunned," and "mute" were descriptions most commonly given to distinguish Irish emigrants along the docks. The authorities, especially the unenviable health and parish relieving officers, were repeatedly frustrated by the tendency of sick or starving emigrants to hide themselves from view in the cellars and tenements, as though fearing to approach even those who meant to help them.

There was some reason to remain unseen, since Irish-born paupers could be brought before the magistrates and immediately returned to Ireland under the Poor Removal Acts. Short of that dreaded prospect, the sick could be removed from the family for quarantine or "treatment" in the fever sheds. Inadvertently, the law also gave the lodging-house keepers and their intermediaries a new means of threatening their guests with exposure and repatriation. The laws and regulations aimed at emigrants, as well as the discretionary powers of health and parish officers, tended to reinforce the ingrained habits of isolation and secrecy with which the emigrants had long used to cloak themselves from scrutiny. In the townland, all deputies of the law or authorities were to be shunned indeed, many succeeded in evading them and some lived entirely out of their sight for years. But anonymity was no longer possible, since in Liverpool the law or the threat of it was everywhere in the person not only of every official but of almost any native citizen.

It is unlikely that most of the newly arriving emigrants understood the variety of proceedings of the law that could derail their hopes and plans: discovery by the relieving officers might be followed in a few hours by a summary hearing before the magistrates and forced removal along the same route they had just survived, as deck passengers back across the Irish Sea. Medical or ship's officers could reject one or all in a family without appeal moments before they boarded. Health officers could order immediate quarantine in the fever sheds or the hulks moored in the river to isolate the infected. Doctors or beadles could remove "lunatics" from the poorhouses to the crowded asylum at Rainhill, where the wards were filled with hundreds who were diagnosed as suffering from "mental paralysis".

A large minority were also handicapped by language or illiteracy. The Irish accents of both native- and Irish-born could be heard throughout the city, distinguishing their bearers' place of origin or even their religious identity to each other. But speaking Irish above a whisper outside the Irish wards instantly marked the emigrant to both the authorities and the swarms of predators. More than half of the native population of the city was also illiterate, but new arrivals from Ireland were at greater risk of exploitation from this cause in the unfamiliar workings of the emigration system, in which reliable information and directions about ship movements, delays, and regulations were essential. At least in these circumstances, the literate children were more likely to be a help than a burden to many emigrant families; indeed, the value and status of the young adults had almost certainly risen as the distance from the townland lengthened and the powers of the elders diminished.

Another large but unknown number arrived in Liverpool with their tickets or their fares only and were completely unprepared for even slight setbacks. The routine delays in sailing dates were especially dangerous for these and accounted for the thousands caught in the gauntlet of official and criminal coercion from which few emerged unscathed and many totally penniless. Many were also vulnerable to the devious practices of the freelance banditti who infested the lower levels of the emigrant trade, being as unused to complicated transactions as they were to schedules or lodging houses. These easily fell afoul of money changers, offering to "dollar" their English coin into American currency of less or no value, or of lodging-house keepers who might keep a family "on the cuff" for food and shelter and strip them bare when payment came due, by force if threats failed.

Many of the petty frauds practiced on them were common bullying: baggage would be stolen by the runners and "commissions" demanded for its return; half-fare childern's tickets were sold to illiterate adults who would then be turned away at the gangplank. Worthless out-of-date tickets were casually altered and bought by the gullible or desperate. Others were refused passage because they lacked the additional one dollar "head money" required at American ports. In their rush to fill the steerages, brokers were known to book emigrants for New York on vessels bound for Baltimore or Boston, or even New Orleans, assuring them that these places were only hours apart.

The fleecing of "greenhorns" was widely practiced in all big cities in Europe and America, often as in Liverpool by those who had survived a similar experience themselves not long before. It soon became a kind of initiation rite for migrant peasants in the new moral niceties of city life. But Liverpool's well-earned fame for this skullduggery could probably not have been achieved but for the overabundance of fresh and easy victims, a role the townland emigrant of 1848 was suited for as if by order.

The exposure of their weakness had begun at the moment they were assembled in the Strokestown square and proceeded daily on the road to Liverpool as they were marched and herded under the eyes of strangers, all now reduced to homeless paupers whatever their former standing had been. Patriarchs and independent widows who had ruled adult families on the land became burdensome dependents when severed from their holdings, and together with infants and children under five suffered the highest rates of attrition en route.

James Connor's father, a patriarch of one of the largest and oldest townland families, was rejected as "too old and debilitated" by a reputable captain who merely wished to reduce the risk of mortality aboard his ship during the crossing. Such descriptions tell us little about the old man's actual condition, since the same description was sometimes used of men or women of less than forty years of age as reason for rejection. Hundreds of similarly described emigrants were "repatriated' weekly from Liverpool alone, some of them no doubt creating bits of the scenes of "want and woe" described by Melville. Of the nearly 300,000 who arrived in 1847, some 15,000 were removed to Ireland under the new Poor Law Removal Act

Scally, Robert James, The End of Hidden Ireland: Rebellion, Famine, and Emigration, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, pp.212-215

QUESTIONS:

How were the Irish waiting to emigrate from Liverpool set apart and isolated?

How were the Irish famine refugees in Liverpool victimized and exploited?

Irish Famine
Unit V
Activity 1

COFFIN SHIPS

"In April Stephen de Vere, of the well-known family of de Vere, Curragh Chase, County Limerick, took a steerage passage on an emigrant vessel to Quebec, in order 'that he might speak as a witness respecting the sufferings of emigrants'. 'Before the emigrant has been a week at sea,' wrote Stephen de Vere, 'he is an altered man... How can it be otherwise ? Hundreds of poor people, men, women and children, of all ages from the drivelling idiot of 90 to the babe just born, huddled together, without light, without air, wallowing in filth, and breathing a fetid atmosphere, sick in body, dispirited in heart... the fevered patients lying between the sound in sleeping places so narrow, as almost to deny them... a change of position... by their agonized ravings disturbing those around them... living without food or medicine except as administered by the hand of casual charity, dying without spiritual consolation and buried in the deep without the rites of the church.'

The food, de Vere continued, was seldom sufficiently cooked because there were not enough cooking places. The supply of water was hardly enough for drinking and cooking-washing was impossible; and in many ships the filthy beds were never brought up on deck and aired, nor was the narrow space between the sleeping-berths washed or scraped until arrival at quarantine. Provisions, doled out by ounces, consisted of meal of the worst quality and salt meat; water was so short that the passengers threw their salt provisions overboard - they could not eat them and satisfy their raging thirst afterwards. People lay for days on end in their dark dose berths, because by that method they suffered less from hunger. The captain used a false measure for water, and the so-called gallon measure held only three pints; for this de Vere had the captain prosecuted and fined on arrival at Quebec. Spirits were sold once or twice a week, and frightful scenes of drunkenness followed. Lights below were prohibited because the ship, in spite of the open cooking-fires on her decks, was carrying a cargo of gunpowder to the garrison at Quebec, but pipes were secretly smoked in the berths, and lucifer matches used. The voyage took three months, and apart from fever, which does not seem to have been serious, many of the passengers, wrote de Vere, became 'utterly debased and corrupted'. Yet he was told that the ship was 'more comfortable than many'.

The worst ships were those which brought emigrants sent out by their landlords, and of all the sufferings endured during the famine none aroused such savage resentment, or left behind such hatred, as the landlord emigrations.

Before the famine, responsible landlords, for instance, Lord Bessborough and Lord Monteagle, advanced money and paid the cost of passages for tenants to emigrate. Lord Monteagle, in particular, believed that in emigration lay the solution of Ireland's population problem, and the Monteagle Papers contain a number of letters from grateful emigrants; he was also responsible for setting up the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Colonization, that is, emigration, in 1847.

Another landlord, Mr. Spaight, of Limerick, a well-known ship broker, bought Deify Castle, in Tipperary, for £40,000 in 1844, and found 'a dead weight of paupers'. As he was engaged in the passenger trade, he offered free passage and provisions to those willing to emigrate, and the value of two pounds on landing, provided the tenants 'tumbled', that is, pulled down, their cabins. He made the offer only to entire families, and said he had 'got rid of crime and distress for £3 10s. a head'. The first failure of the potato was followed by a number of landlord emigrations, and a total of more than a thousand tenants from various estates reached Quebec in 1846, those arriving early in the season being reasonably healthy and, on the whole, adequately provided for.

The fatal year 1847 brought a change. In January the Government announced that the whole destitute population was to be transferred to the Poor Law, to be maintained out of local rates at the expense of owners of property, and the only hope of solvency for landlords was to reduce the number of destitute on their estates. Emigration began to be used as an alternative to eviction, and Sir Robert Gore Booth, a resident landlord, was accused by Mr. Perley, the Government emigration agent at St. John, New Brunswick, of 'exporting and shovelling out the helpless and infirm to the detriment of the colony'. Sir Robert in reply put forward the landlord's point of view, declaring that emigration was the only humane method of putting properties in Ireland on a satisfactory footing. The country was overpopulated, and it was not right to evict and turn people out on the world. To emigrate them was the only solution.

Emigration also saved money; the cost of emigrating a pauper was generally about half the cost of maintaining him in the work-house for one year, and once the ship had sailed the destitute were effectually got rid of, for they could return only with immense difficulty. In 1847, therefore, the temptation was strong to ship off as cheaply as possible those unfortunates who, through age, infirmity or the potato failure, had become useless and an apparently endless source of expense.

No attempt was made to regulate landlord emigration, but the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners did warn landlords that each tenant should have at least one pound landing-money, and provided the necessary organization for remitting money to British North America. No money, however, was sent.

On December 11, 1847, Mr. Adam Ferric, a member of the Legislative Council of Canada, wrote a furious open letter on Irish landlord emigration to the British Colonial Secretary, Earl Grey. He denounced landlords by name, the best-known being Lord Palmerston and Major Mahon, of Strokestown, County Roscommon, who later was tragically murdered. Hordes of half-naked, starving paupers, declared Mr. Ferric, including aged, infirm, beggars and vagrants, had been shipped off to 'this young and thinly populated county without regard to humanity or even to common decency'. They were given promises of clothes, food and money and told that an agent would pay from two to five pounds to each family, according to size, on arrival at Quebec; when they arrived no agent could be found, and they were thrown on the Government and private charity. Twice as many passengers as the ship should hold were 'huddled together between decks'; there was too little food and water and conditions were 'as bad as the slave trade'.

Nine vessels had left Sligo carrying tenants emigrated by Lord Palmerston from his estates, and additional passages were hooked from Liverpool, about 2,000 persons leaving in all. The first vessel to arrive, the *Elira Liddell*, at St. John, New Brunswick, in July, 1847, raised a storm of protest; it was alleged that she brought only widows with young children, and aged, destitute, decrepit persons, useless to the colony. Another vessel, the *Lord Ashburton*, arrived at Quebec on October 30, dangerously late in the season, carrying 477 passengers, 174 of whom, Lord Palmerston's tenants, were almost naked: 87 of them had to be clothed by charity before they could, with decency, leave the ship. On the *Lord Asburton* 107 persons had died on the voyage of fever and dysentery; 60 were ill, and so deplorable was the condition of the crew that five passengers had to work the ship up to Grosse Isle. The *Quebec Gazette* described the condition of the *Lord Ashburton as* 'a disgrace to the home authorities'. Even later in the year, on November 8, 1847, the brig *Richard Watson* arrived, carrying tenants of Lord Palmerston's, one of whom, a woman, was completely naked, and had to have a sheet wrapped round her before she could go ashore.

Most notorious of all was the *Aeolus*--bringing tenants of Lord Palmerston's from Sligo--which arrived at St. John, New Brunswick, on November 2. The St. Lawrence was then closed by ice, the Canadian winter had begun, and caleches, or horse-drawn sleighs, had replaced carriages in the snow-filled streets of Quebec. The captain of the *Aeolus* paid £250 in bonds to be allowed to land 240 emigrants at St. John. They were 'almost in a state of nudity', and the surgeon at Partridge Island, the quarantine station, asserted that ninety-nine per cent must become a public charge immediately: they were widows with helpless young families, decrepit old women, and men 'riddled with disease'.

The citizens of St. John declared that they could not feed or shelter the unfortunate emigrants; notices were posted in the streets offering to all who would go back to Ireland a free passage and food; and message was sent to Lord Palmerston that the 'Common Council of the City of St. John deeply regret that one of Her Majesty's ministers, the Rt. Hon. Lord Palmerston, either by himself or his authorized agent should have exposed such a numerous and distressed portion of his tenantry to the severity and privations of a New Brunswick winter... unprovided with the common means of support, with broken-down constitutions and almost in a state of nudity'."

Woodham-Smith, Cecil, The Great Hunger; Ireland 1845-1849
Penguin Books, London, England, 1991. First printing: 1962.
pp.226-228

QUESTIONS:

What were the conditions for the Irish Famine victims on board the "coffin ships"?

Why did the landlords in Ireland wish to pay for their tenants to leave?

Why were the worst conditions found on the ships paid for by the landlords?

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Unit V
Objective 2
Activity 1

Regulations at Quebec required that all ships with passengers coming up the St. Lawrence should stop at the quarantine station on Grosse Isle, thirty miles down the river, for medical inspection; those vessels which had sickness on board were then detained and the sick taken to the quarantine hospital. Grosse Isle, a beautiful island, lying in the middle of the majestic St. Lawrence, had been selected as the site for a quarantine station in 1832, at the time of a cholera epidemic.

On February 19, 1847, Dr. Douglas, the medical officer in charge of the quarantine station at Grosse Isle, asked for £3,000 to make preparations for the coming immigration, pointing out that during the previous year the number admitted to the quarantine hospital had been twice as large as usual, and that reports from Ireland indicated that the state of the immigrants this year would be worse.

Far from getting £3,000, Dr. Douglas was assigned just under £300. He was allowed one small steamer, the *St. George,* to ply between Grosse Isle and Quebec and given permission to hire a sailing-vessel, provided one could be found for not more than £50 for the season.

The citizens of Quebec, however, were so uneasy, that at the beginning of March, 1847, they sent a petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey, in which they pointed out that the number of Irish immigrants was annually rising, that the present distress in Ireland must mean a further large increase, that they viewed with alarm the probable fate of poor Irish immigrants in the rigorous winter climate of Canada, and that there was also the possibility of such immigrants bringing disease. They begged the Canadian Government to take action.

The *Montreal Gazette,* prophesying that Canada was going to be 'inundated with an enormous crowd of poor and destitute emigrants', called for 'legislative measures' to meet the coming crisis. Everyone knew, declared the *Gazette,* that Quebec was merely the port where emigrants disembarked for a few hoists, to embark again for Montreal, and it was on Montreal that the inundation would descend. However, a meeting of Montreal citizens, called by the Emigration Committee of Montreal on May to, 1847, to consider what steps should be taken, was so poorly attended that the meeting was adjourned.

There was one man who might have been able to convince the Canadian Government that a catastrophe was approaching, Alexander Carlisle Buchanan. He was the Chief Emigration Officer, he was esteemed in official circles, his reports were studied, his opinion carried weight. Nevertheless, Buchanan, though he anticipated a very considerable increase in sickness, 'did not make any official representation to Government' because, as he wrote, 'it was a subject that did not come within the control of my department'.

The Government, therefore, received no official warning that the emigration from Ireland was likely to present any problem, beyond being unusually large; and in April, 1847, the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners made their seventh report without any inkling that disaster threatened. In the Canadian Legislature soothing assurances were given; the coming immigration would certainly he large, but the present system was adequate to deal with it; in 1846, 125,000 persons had arrived (this was an exaggeration), but the system had been found to work, 'and in general there were no complaints'.

The opening of the St. Lawrence was late in 1847; 'the merry month of May started with ice an inch thick', reported the *Quebec Gazette*, and the first vessel, the *Syria*, did not arrive until May 17. Less than a week later the catastrophe had taken place, and was beyond control. The *Syria* had 84 cases of fever on board, out of a total of 241 passengers--nine persons had died on the voyage, and one was to die on landing at Grosse Isle. All her passengers were Irish, had crossed to Liverpool to embark, and had spent one night at least in the cheap lodging-houses of Liverpool. In Dr. Douglas's opinion, 20 to 24 more were certain to sicken, bringing the total for the *Syria* to more than 100, and the quarantine hospital, built for 150 cases, could not possibly accommodate more than 200.

Dr. Douglas now told the Canadian Government that he had 'reliable information' that. 10,600 emigrants at least had left Britain for Quebec since April 10: 'Judging from the specimens just arrived', large numbers would have to go to hospital, and he asked permission to build a new shed, to cost about £150, to be used as a hospital. On May 20, he received authority to erect the shed provided the cost was kept down to £135."

Four days after the *Syria*, on May 21, eight ships arrived with a total of 430 fever cases. Two hundred and five were taken into the hospital, which became dangerously overcrowded, and the remaining 216 had to be left on board ship. 'I have not a bed to lay them on or a place to put them,' wrote Dr. Douglas. 'I never contemplated the possibility of every vessel arriving with fever as they do now.'

Three days later seventeen more vessels arrived, all with fever; a shed normally used to accommodate passengers detained for quarantine was turned into a hospital and instantly filled. There were now 695 persons in hospital and 164 on board ship waiting to be taken off; and Dr. Douglas wrote that he had just received a message that twelve more vessels had anchored, 'all sickly'.

On May 26 thirty vessels, with 10,000 emigrants on board, were waiting at Grosse Isle; by the 29th there were thirty-six vessels, with 13,000 emigrants. And 'in all these vessels cases of fever and dysentery had occurred', wrote Dr. Douglas-the dysentery seems to have been infections, and was probably bacillary dysentery.

On May 31 forty vessels were waiting, extending in a line two miles down the St. Lawrence; about 1,100 cases of fever were on Grosse Isle in sheds, tents, and laid in rows in the little church; an equal number were on board the ships, waiting to be taken off; and a further 45,000 emigrants at least were expected.

On June 1 the Catholic Archbishop of Quebec addressed a circular letter to all Catholic Bishops and Archbishops in Ireland, asking them to 'use every endeavor to prevent your diocesans emigrating in such numbers to Canada'. Nevertheless, the numbers continued to mount; ultimately, in 1847, 109,000 are stated to have left for British North America, 'almost all', stated the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, 'Irish'.

By July, more than 2,500 sick were on Grosse Isle, and conditions were appalling. 'Medical men,' wrote Dr. Douglas, were 'disgusted with the disagreeable nature of their duties in treating such filthy cases.' Many doctors died; Dr. Benson, of Dublin, who had experience in fever hospitals in Ireland, arrived on May 2d and volunteered his services, but caught typhus and died six days later. Each of the medical officers was ill at some time, and three other doctors died of typhus, in addition to Dr. Benson. At one period twelve out of a medical staff of fourteen were ill; of the two others, one left because he was afraid of catching typhus and one was summoned to a dying parent, leaving Dr. Douglas virtually single-handed.

Patients on the ships were often left for four or five days without any medical attention: under the Passenger Act of 1842 ships were not compelled to carry a doctor, and only one doctor besides Dr. Benson happened to have been a passenger.

Nurses, too, were unobtainable, and the sick suffered tortures from lack of attention. A Catholic priest, Father Moylan, gave water to sick persons in a tent who had had nothing to drink for eighteen hours; another, Father McQuirk, was given *carte blanche* by Dr. Douglas to hire nurses, as many as possible, from among the healthy passengers. He offered high wages and told the women that, speaking as their priest, it was their duty to volunteer; not one came forward. The fear of fever among the Irish, said Dr. Douglas, was so great that 'the nearest relatives abandon each other whenever they can'. The only persons who could be induced to take charge of the sick were abandoned and callous creatures, of both sexes, who robbed the dead.

Woodham-Smith, Cecil, The Great Hunger; Ireland 1845-1849 Penguin Books, London, England,
1991. p.218-221

APPENDIX III

ON THE ISLAND: THE HORRORS OF GROSSE ISLE'

The Canadian authorities were hardly less remiss than the British in preparations to meet the terrible emergency before them; although they had equally received ample warning of it. In 1846, Dr Douglas, the medical superintendent at Grosse Isle, had repeatedly urged them to get ready for what was coming. The British, Irish, American and Canadian newspapers had almost daily reported and commented on the alarming progress which the famine and pestilence were making in Ireland, so that they could not plead ignorance of the ominous outlook or of the fact that the emigration from the Green Isle to Canada in 1847 would be on a very large scale.

Early in that year Mr. Robert Christie, the historian, then a leading member of the Provincial Parliament, wrote to the Provincial Secretary, Hon. Dominick Daly, complaining of the Government's inexcusable failure to take proper and necessary precautions and pointing out the great danger to which the country would be exposed, together with the measures to be adopted to avert it. Reverend Fr Moylan, the Catholic missionary at Grosse Isle in those days, also gave timely forewarning to the Government with respect to the gravity of the situation and it was upon his urgent recommendation that, later when the crisis was on, the available police force to keep order on the island was increased by 50 men of the 93rd Regiment, under Lt. Studdard, sent down from Quebec.

But all the signs and the warnings of the coming storm were virtually unheeded until it was practically too late. The only additions made to the Quarantine establishment were through the purchase of 50 bedsteads, double the quantity of straw used in former years and the erection of a new shed or building to serve as a hospital and to contain 60 more beds. In this way, provision, including the old hospitals and sheds dating from 1832, was made for only 200 sick, the average of former years never having attained half that number requiring admission at one time. How utterly inadequate this was, the alarming sequel soon showed.

But, while there was little or no excuse for the failure of the British authorities to have risen equal to the great emergency, there was certainly a good deal for that of their Canadian colleagues. At that time the British North American provinces were comparatively new and poor, carrying on a struggling existence and possessing little means or few resources that were then available. Their political and social organization was yet in a more or less primitive and chaotic state, and as already seen, they were also divided among themselves by conflicting opinions as to the gravity of the danger and the steps to be taken to avert or meet it.

However, they were very soon brought face to face with it in all its hideousness and scarcely a month had elapsed after the opening of navigation in 1847, when a session of the Provincial Parliament was hurriedly called and held in Montreal, a select committee was appointed to inquire into the situation, and a commission was also appointed consisting of Drs. Painchaud, of Quebec and McDonnell and Campbell, of Montreal, to investigate the character and amount of sick-ness prevailing among the emigrants at Grosse Isle and the best mode to be adopted to arrest the disease and prevent its dissemination, with full powers to make all such changes on the island as they thought proper.

The commissioners reported. Of the sick in the hospitals, sheds and tents, they said: "We found thence unfortunate people in the most deplorable condition for want of necessary nurses and hospital attendants; their friends who had partially recovered being in too many instances unable and in most, unwilling, to render them any, assistance, common sympathies being apparently annihilated by the mental and bodily depression produced by famine and disease. At our inspection of many of the vessels, we witnessed some appalling instances of what we have now stated - corpses lying in the same beds with the sick and the dying, the healthy not taking the trouble to remove them."

Immediate steps were taken by the commissioners for affording temporary shelter on the island, by means of spars and sails borrowed from the ships and the putting up of shanties for the accommodation of the healthy.

What pen can fittingly describe the horrors of that shocking summer at Grosse Isle? All the eye-witnesses, all the writers on the subject, agree in saying that they have never been surpassed in pathos, as well as in hideousness and ghastliness. In a few months one of the most beautiful spots on the St Lawrence was converted into a great lazar and charnel-house to be forever sanctified by the saddest memories of an unhappy race.

In speaking of the fever sheds, Mr. De Vere says: "They were very miserable, so slightly built as to exclude neither the heat nor the cold. No sufficient care was taken to remove the sick from the sound or to disinfect and clean the beddings. The very straw upon which they had lain was often allowed to become a bed for their successors and I have known many poor families prefer to burrow under heaps of loose stones, near the shore, rather than accept the shelter of the infected sheds."

Captain, afterwards Admiral Boxer, of Crimean fame, stated that there was nothing more terrible than the sheds. Most of the patients were attacked with dysentery and the smell was dreadful, as there was no ventilation.

Frs. Moylan and O'Reilly saw the emigrants in the sheds lying on the bare hoards and ground for whole nights and days without either bed or bedding. Two, and sometimes three, were in a berth. No distinction was made as to sex, age or nature of illness. Food was insufficient and the bread not baked. Patients were supplied three times a day with tea, gruel or broth. How any of them ever recovered is a wonder. Fr O'Reilly visited two ships, the *Avon* and the *Triton*. The former lost 136 passengers on the voyage and the latter 93. All these were thrown overboard and buried in the Atlantic. He administered the last rites to over 200 sick on hoard these ships. Fr Moylan's description of the condition of the holds of these vessels is simply most revolting and horrible.

As for the dead, who were not buried at sea, it has been already seen how they were taken from the pest ships and corded like firewood on the beach to await burial. In many instances the corpses were carried out of the foul smelling holds or they were dragged with boat-hooks out of them by sailors and others who had to be paid a sovereign for each.

A word more as to the removal of the corpses from the vessels. They were brought from the hold, where the darkness was, as it were, rendered more visible by the miserable untrimmed oil lamp that showed light in some places sufficient to distinguish a form, but not a face. It was more by touch than by sight that the passengers knew each other. First came the touch and then the question, who is it? Even in the bunks many a loved one asked the same question to one by his or her side, for in the darkness that reigned their eyesight was failing them.

The priest, leaving daylight and sunlight behind, as each step from deck led him down the narrow ladder into the hold of the vessels of those days, as wanting in ventilation as the Black Hole of Calcutta, had to make himself known and your poor Irish emigrant with the love and reverence he had for his clergy, who stuck to him through thick and thin, endeavored to raise himself and warmly greet him with the little strength that remained.

Another death announced, orders were given by the captain for the removal of the body. Kind hands in many cases attended to this. In other cases, as we have seen, it was left to strangers. Up the, little narrow ladder to the deck, were the corpses borne in the same condition in which they died, victims among other things of filth, uncleanliness and bed sores and with hardly any clothing on them. There was no pretence of decency or the slightest humanity shown.

On deck a rope was placed around the emaciated form of the Irish peasant, father, mother, wife and husband, sister and brother. The rope was hoisted and with their heads and naked limbs dangling for a moment in mid-air, with the wealth of hair of the Irish maiden, or young Irish matron, or the silvered locks of the poor old Irish grandmother floating in the breeze, they were finally lowered over the ship's side into the boats, rowed to the island and left on the rocks until such time as they were coffined. Well might His Grace the Archbishop of Quebec, in his letter to the Bishops of Ireland, say that the details he received of the scenes of horror and desolation at the island almost staggered belief and baffled description.

There was no delay in burying the dead. The spot selected for their last resting place was a lonely one at the western end of the island at about 10 acres from the landing. At first the graves were not dug a sufficient depth. The rough coffins were piled one over the other and the earth covering the upper row, in some instances, was not more than a foot deep and generally speaking about a foot and a half. The cemetery was about 6 acres in extent. Later huge trenches were dug in it about 5 or 6 feet deep and in these the bodies were laid often uncoffined. Six men were kept constantly employed at this work.

Be'chard, in his history of the island, adds a new horror to the ghoulish scene. He states that an army of rats, which had come ashore from the fever ships, invaded the field of death, took possession of it and pierced it with innumerable holes to get at and gnaw the bodies buried in the shallow graves until hundreds of loads of earth had to be carted and placed upon them.

At first, says the late J. M. O'Leary, the sick were placed in the hospitals, while the seemingly healthy were sent to the sheds, but emigrants were continually arriving who were left for days and nights without a bed under them, or a cover over them, wasting and melting away under the united influence of fever and dysentery, without anyone to give them a drink during their long hours of raging thirst and terrible sufferings.

For want of beds and bedding, for want of attendants, hundreds of poor creatures - after a long voyage consumed by confinement and hunger, thirst and disease - were compelled to spend the long, long nights and sultry days, lying on the hard boards without a pillow under their burning heads, without a hand to moisten their parched lips or fevered brows and what was the result? They who, by a little providential precaution and ordinary care, might have been restored to their large, helpless families and distracted relations, were hurried away in a few hours to their premature and unhonored graves while those who should at once have provided for their salvation at any cost and sacrifice were haggling about the means.

What encouragement was it for a young professional man to expose himself to almost certain death for the paltry remuneration of 17 shillings and 6 pence a day held out to those who tendered their services? What could be hoped for or expected from nurses who were willing to spend their nights and days in a fever hospital for 3 shillings a day?

In the sheds were double tiers of bunks, the upper one about 3 feet above the lower. As the planks of the former were not placed close together, the filth from the sick fell upon those in the lower tier who were too weak to move. Filth was thus allowed to accumulate and with so vast a crowd of fever cases in one place and with no ventilation, generated a miasma so virulent and concentrated that few who came within its poisonous atmosphere escaped.

Clergy, doctors, hospital attendants, servants and police, fell ill one after the other and not a few of them succumbed. A number of the captains, officers and crews of the pest ships also died at Grosse Isle and some of the vessels were so decimated of these during the voyage across and so short-handed, that it is a wonder how they ever reached the island.

Oftentimes there were two and sometimes three in a bed without any distinction of age, sex or nature of illness. Corpses remained all night in the places where death occurred, even when there was a companion in the same bed, while the bodies that had been brought from the ships were piled like cordwood on the beach without any covering over them until such time as they were coffined.

In the midst of this fierce Canadian summer, thousands of sick kept pouring into Grosse Isle. Not a drop of fresh water was to be found on the island, no lime juice, no clean straw even to protect the patients from the wet ground in the tents while in the beginning of July, with the thermometer at 98° in the shade, hundreds were landed from the ships and thrown rudely by the unfeeling crews, on the burning rocks and there they remained whole nights and days without shelter of any kind.

Mangan, James (Ed.), Robert Whyte's 1847 Famine Ship Diary, Mercier Press, Dublin, Ireland, 1994. P.111-121

Irish Famine
Unit V
Objective 2
Activity 1

Questions for discussion:

How many famine and fever victims were the medical authorities at Grosse Isle prepared to handle? How many arrived in 1847? Why were they so unprepared?

What was the general state of the Irish emigrants as they arrived at Grosse Isle?

Were the famine victims given food, water, shelter, clothing, medical care and decent burials?

In what sense were the Irish better off than they were in Ireland?

VI
Genocide

Performance Objectives:

1. The student will weigh the opinions of historians and attempt to come to a conclusion about genocide in Ireland during the Great Famine.

Teaching/learning Strategies and Activities:

Students will study the opinions of historians and compare them with definitions of genocide provided.

Activity 1. Students will read "Genocide", answer questions following the readings and discuss the issues raised.

Instructional Materials/Resources:

"Genocide" (see footnotes for sources)

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Irish Famine
Unit VI
Activity 1

GENOCIDE

The American Heritage Dictionary defines genocide as: "The systematic, planned annihilation of a racial, political or cultural group."

The United Nations Convention on Genocide, adopted by the U.N. in 1948 lists this as one of the acts which qualify: "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its destruction in whole or part."

Richard L. Rubenstein in his book The Age of Triage: Fear and Hope in an Overcrowded World offers yet another definition. He states, "...a government is as responsible for a genocidal policy when its officials accept mass death as a necessary cost of implementing their policies as when they pursue genocide as an end in itself." (1.)

BRITISH, IRISH AND AMERICAN VOICES:

IMMORAL SELF-INTEREST

Oxford history professor James Anthony Froude, who once wrote that Irish folk were "more like squalid apes than human beings" wrote the following in his book, English in Ireland: "England governed Ireland for what she deemed her own interest, making her calculations on the gross balance of her trade ledgers, and leaving moral obligations aside, as if right and wrong had been blotted out of the statute book of the Universe." (2.)

Dr. GRAY

In his essay, "Ideology and the Famine", Belfast-born and Cambridge-educated historian Peter Gray wrote that:

"It is difficult to refute the indictment made by one humanitarian English observer in the later stages of the Famine, that amidst 'an abundance of cheap food...very many have been done to death by pure tyranny'. The charge of culpable neglect of the consequences of policies leading to mass starvation is indisputable. That a conscious choice to pursue moral or economic objectives at the expense of human life was made by several ministers is also demonstrable."

Professor Gray concludes, however, that British government policy "was not a policy of deliberate genocide", but a dogmatic refusal to admit the policy was wrong and "amounted to a sentence of death to many thousands." (3.)

PROFESSOR CLARK

Dennis Clark, an Irish-American historian, wrote in The Irish in Philadelphia that the famine was "the culmination of generations of neglect, misrule and repression. It was an epic of English colonial cruelty and inadequacy. For the landless cabin dwellers it meant emigration or extinction... (4.)

The dimensions of the calamity can hardly be delineated by simple statistics. England had presided over an epochal disaster too monstrous and too impersonal to be a mere product of individual ill-will or the fiendish outcome of a well-planned conspiracy. It was something worse: the cumulative antagonism and corruption of the English ruling class was visited with crushing intensity upon a long-enfeebled foe. It was as close to genocide as colonialism would come in the nineteenth century."

About the 500,000 men, women and children evicted during the Famine, Clark wrote: "The British government's insistence on 'the absolute rights of landlords'" to evict farmers and their families so they could raise cattle and sheep, was a process "as close to 'ethnic cleansing' as any Balkan war ever enacted." (5.)

PROFESSOR DONNELLY

Professor James S. Donnelly Jr., a historian at the University of Wisconsin, wrote the following in Landlord and Tenant in Nineteenth-Century Ireland:

"I would draw the following broad conclusion: at a fairly early stage of the Great Famine the government's abject failure to stop or even slow down the clearnaces (evictions) contributed in a major way to enshrining the idea of English state-sponsored genocide in Irish popular mind. Or perhaps one should say in the Irish mind, for this was a notion that appealed to many educated and discriminating men and women, and not only to the revolutionary minority..."

But Donnelly concludes otherwise: "And it is also my contention that while genocide was not in fact committed, what happened during and as a result of the clearances had the look of genocide to a great many Irish..." (6.)

COMMISSIONER TWISLETON

When the Irish Poor Law Commissioner, Edward Twisleton resigned in protest over lack of relief aid from Britain, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Earl of Clarendon, wrote the following to British Prime Minister Lord John Russell:

"He (Twisleton) thinks that the destitution here [in Ireland] is so horrible, and the indifference of the House of Commons is so manifest, that he is an unfit agent for a policy that must be one of extermination." (7.)

In 1849 Twisleton testified that "comparatively trifling sums were required for Britain to spare itself the deep disgrace of permitting its miserable fellow subjects to die of starvation." According to Gray, the British spent 7 million Pounds for relief in Ireland between 1845 and 1850, "representing less than half of one percent of the British gross national product over five years. Contemporaries noted the sharp contrast with the 20 million Pounds compensation given to West Indian slave-owners in the 1830s." (8.)

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LORD CLARENDON

The Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Earl of Clarendon wrote a letter to Prime Minister Russell on April 26th, 1849, expressing his feelings about lack of aid from the British House of Commons:

"I do not think there is another legislature in Europe that would disregard such suffering as now exists in the west of Ireland, or coldly persist in a policy of extermination." (9.)

PROFESSOR SENIOR

Nassau Senior, a respected economics professor at Oxford University said that the Famine in Ireland "would not kill more than one million people, and that would scarcely be enough to do any good." (10.)

EDWARDS AND WILLIAMS

In The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History 1845-52 Editors R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams wrote:

"The political commentator, the ballad singer and the unknown maker of folk-tales have all spoken about the Great famine, but is there more to be said? If man, the prisoner of time, acts in conformity with the conventions of society into which he is born, it is difficult to judge him with irrevocable harshness. So it is with the men of the famine era. Human limitations and timidity dominate the story of the Great Famine, but of great and deliberately imposed evil in high positions of responsibility there is little evidence." (11.)

JOHN MITCHEL

John Mitchel, leader of the Young Ireland Movement, wrote the following in 1860:

"I have called it an artificial famine: that is to say, it was a famine which desolated a rich and fertile island, that produced every year abundance and superabundance to sustain all her people and many more. The English, indeed, call the famine a "dispensation of Providence;" and ascribe it entirely to the blight on potatoes. But potatoes failed in like manner all over Europe; yet there was no famine save in Ireland. The British account of the matter, then, is first, a fraud - second, a blasphemy. The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the famine." (12.)

OTHER IRISH NATIONALISTS

In 1848, Denis Shine Lawlor suggested that Lord John Russell was a student of the poet Spenser, who had inhumanely calculated "how far English colonization and English policy might be most effectively carried out by Irish starvation." (13.)

That same year a Cork City Councilor named Brady told his audience that the British Prime Minister had "violated every pledge previously made on arriving at place and power... a million and a half Irish people perished, were smitten and offered up as a holocaust, whose blood ascended to the throne of God for redress..., but the pity was that the minister was permitted to act so with impunity."

On April 1, 1848, an editorial writer in The Nation said, "It is evident to all men that our foreign government is but a club for grave-diggers...we are decimated not by the will of God but the will of the Whigs." (14.)

WOODHAM - SMITH

At the end of The Great Hunger, Cecil Woodham-Smith concludes:

"These misfortunes were not part of a plan to destroy the Irish nation; they fell on the people because the government of Lord John Russell was afflicted with an extraordinary inability to foresee consequences. It has been frequently declared that the parsimony of the British Government during the famine was the main cause of the sufferings of the people, and parsimony was certainly carried to remarkable lengths; but obtuseness, short-sightedness and ignorance probably contributed more." (15.)

"Much of this obtuseness sprang from the fanatical faith of mid-nineteenth century British politicians in the economic doctrine of laissez-faire, no interference by government, no meddling with the operation of natural causes. Adherence to laissez-faire was carried to such a length that in the midst of one of the major famines of history, the government was perpetually nervous of being too good to Ireland and of corrupting the Irish people by kindness, and so stifling the virtues of self reliance and industry."

"In addition hearts were hardened by the antagonism then felt by the English towards the Irish, an antagonism rooted far back in religious and political history, and at the period of the famine, irritation had been added as well...It is impossible to read the letters of British statesmen of the period, Charles Wood and Trevelyan for instance, without astonishment at the influence exerted by antagonism and irritation on government policy in Ireland during the famine."

"It is not characteristic of the English to behave as they have behaved in Ireland; as a nation, the English have proved themselves to be capable of generosity, tolerance and magnanimity, but not where Ireland is concerned. As Sydney Smith, the celebrated writer and wit, wrote: 'The moment the very name of Ireland is mentioned, the English seem to bid adieu to common feeling, common prudence and common sense, and to act with the barbarity of tyrants and the fatuity of idiots."' (16.)

CHRISTINE KINEALY

At the end of The Great Calamity, Christine Kinealy writes:

"While it was evident that the government had to do something to help alleviate the suffering, the particular nature of the actual response, especially following 1846, suggests a more covert agenda and motivation. As the Famine progressed, it became apparent that the government was using its information not merely to help it formulate its relief policies, but also as an opportunity to facilitate various long-desired changes within Ireland. These included population control and the consolidation of property through various means, including emigration...

Despite the overwhelming evidence of prolonged distress caused by successive years of potato blight, the underlying philosophy of the relief efforts was that they should be kept to a minimalist level; in fact they actually decreased as the Famine progressed." (17.)

BRITISH COLONIAL POLICIES

Cecil Woodham-Smith, an Englishwoman, wrote that "It is not characteristic of the English to behave as they have behaved in Ireland." The following historical record offer contrary evidence. Briefly consider five issues: British treatment of American prisoners during the Revolution, British domination of the slave trade, British government-backed "Opium War", British concentration camps used during the Boer War, and the 1943 mass starvation in British-ruled Bengal, India.

1. BRITISH STARVED AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR PRISONERS

During the American Revolution the British put captured rebel soldiers, sailors, and civilians onboard floating dungeons called "horrible hulks." According to Albert Martin in The War for Independence, "They were worse than any prison ashore."

On the worst boat, H.M.S. Jersey, nicknamed `Hell Afloat', "Prisoners were allowed half the Royal navy's ration, and that was food rejected as too spoiled even for Her Majesty's seamen. Rats and vermin swarmed through Jersey, spreading disease."

"Although the Jersey held 1,100 prisoners with more arriving daily, overcrowding was no problem, since the dying made way for the newcomers. Each morning a Redcoat sergeant bellowed through the bars, 'Rebels, turn out your dead.' No fewer than five bodies were hoisted up each day."

The only way to get off the hulks was to change sides and enlist in the service of King George III. "British officers constantly spoke of His Majesty's generosity toward rebels who mended their ways. Yet very few accepted the offer to turn traitor. Their willingness to suffer is proof of their devotion to the cause of American independence." Over eleven thousand men died in these hulks, more than lost their lives in all of George Washinqton's battles.._(18.)

2. DURING THE 17TH AND EARLY 18TH CENTURY, ENGLAND WAS THE LEADING SLAVE TRADING NATION

According to a 1980 book, The African Slave Trade, England began trading slaves in 1562 when London merchants financed "three good ships" with hundreds of men in their crews, to sail under the command of William

Hawkins. In Guinea, they "got into their possession, partly by the sword and partly by other means to the number of 300 Negroes at least." (20.)

Between 1795-1804 when English slave trade was at its height, the following were the clearances for ships from the three main English ports:

Port.	Slaves allowed by regulation	Ships
Liverpool	323,770	1,099
London	46,505	155
Bristol	10,718	29

"The value of British income derived from (slave) trade with the West Indies was said to be four times greater than the value of British incomes derived from trade with the rest of the world. And this West India trade was in many respects the ideal colonial system. The trade consisted in simple exchange of cheap manufactured goods for African slaves, of African slaves for West India foodstuffs and tobacco; and of these products, once brought to Europe, for a high return in cash." (21.)

3. THE BRITISH USED WARSHIPS AND TROOPS TO FORCE CHINA TO ACCEPT IMPORTED OPIUM

According to World History From 1500 the British wanted Chinese tea, but had nothing but cash to trade for it. Their colony in India was producing a good crop of opium, but it was prohibited in China except for medical purposes. The Chinese resisted illegal British opium trafficking, and that led to the "Opium War". Britain used superior firepower, ships and troops to force the Chinese to accept opium sales. "The opium trade amounted to millions of silver dollars and hundreds of tons of opium annually." (22.)

4. THE BRITISH STARVED THOUSANDS IN BOER WAR CONCENTRATION CAMPS

Fifty years after a million Irish people starved to death under British rule, the English fought their last great imperialist war. Major-General Horatio H. Kitchener commanded the British troops fighting the Dutch Boers in South Africa.

According to English author Thomas Pakenham, in his 1979 book The Boer War, Kitchener hoped to defeat the guerilla forces by destroying their means of support. He ordered the Boer farms burned and all the cattle, sheep and other livestock killed. His soldiers then rounded up all the men, women and children who were not guerilla fighters, and put them into concentration camps near railroad lines.

One hundred and fifty thousand people, white and black, were interned in camps with no running water, no meat, no milk for the children, and little fresh fruit or vegetables. Humanitarians reported that fever-stricken children-were dying in the dirt. Twenty to twenty-eight thousand people died of malnutrition and related diseases, according to Pakenham. British "methods of barbarism" in South Africa shocked the world.

5. WHILE UNDER BRITISH COLONIAL RULE, MILLIONS STARVED IN BENGAL, INDIA

According to Dr. Gideon Polya, a professor in Victoria, Australian, the 1943-44 famine that killed an estimated 3.5 to 5 million people in Bengal was "man-made". Dr. Polya says that "the British brought an unsympathetic and ruthless economic agenda to India" and that "the creation of famine" was brought about by British "sequestration and export of food for enhanced commercial gain."

He says that "British disinclination to respond with urgency and vigor to food deficits resulted in a succession of about 2 dozen appalling famines during the British occupation of India." These swept away tens of millions of people. One of the worst famines was that of 1770 that killed an estimated 10 million people in Bengal (one third of the population) and which was "exacerbated by the rapacity of the (British) East India Company".

Dr. Polya writes that "An extraordinary feature of the appalling record of British imperialism with respect to genocide and mass, world-wide killing of huge numbers of people (by war disease and famine) is its absence from public perception. Thus, for example, inspection of a selection of British history texts reveals that mention of the appalling Irish Famine of 1845-47 is confined in each case to several lines (although there is of course detailed discussion of the attendant, related political debate about the Corn Laws). It is hardly surprising that there should be no mention of famine in India or Bengal."

The 1998 Nobel Prize winner in economics, Indian-born Amartya Sen, was a childhood victim of the Bengal famine. He said, "Any famine is easy to prevent if a government has the incentive to prevent it. If the government generates the income, then the market can deal with the supply problem very well by moving food." Famines never strike democracies, Professor Sen contends. "Democracy gives a political incentive for the government to intervene… elected governments feel an obligation to intercede on behalf of constituents. Autocrats feel no such compunction."

If the above historical record is true, then it is characteristic of British officials to behave as they behaved in Ireland. However, one cannot conclude that the ruthless actions of the ruling elite had the complete support of the British people.

THE CASE FOR GENOCIDE IN IRELAND: A SUMMARY

1. British Laws enacted over centuries, deprived the Irish of their land, language, trade, education, vote and religion.

2. British racism against the Irish people has been manifest for centuries, and has been used to dehumanize, debase, criminalize and enslave the Irish. British racism also extended to Africans, Indians, Egyptians and other conquered peoples.

3. The British government upheld the absolute right of landlords to evict Irish families during a terrible famine even in the dead of winter. Further, the Poor Law was encouraged landlords to engage in eviction in order not to be bankrupted by poor rates for their tenants.

4. The British allowed massive amounts of food to be exported from Ireland during the Famine and justified it under the doctrine of laissez-faire, or non-interference. However, British interference in Irish trade has been prolonged and continuous, before, during, and after the Famine.

5. The British authorities were well aware that the Poor Law made landlords more likely to make a one-time payment for "coffin ship" passage for their tenants rather that continue to pay taxes for their upkeep in workhouses. Canadian officials repeatedly sent reports informing British officials of the massive mortality rates on these ships.

QUESTIONS:

Which historian or author provides the weakest arguments about genocide? Which the strongest? Why?

Which, if any, of the three definitions of genocide applies to British rule in Ireland?

Why is it important to consider the other acts of starvation imposed by the British in the historical period before and after the Famine?

Do the actions of the British government related to the Revolutionary War prison ships, the slave trade, the Opium War, the Boer War, and the Bengal famine influence your opinion about whether or not the British were capable of genocide in Ireland?

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UNIT VII

FAMINE POETRY

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

1. The student will determine the attitude of the poet toward the Famine experience by focusing on his/her use of imagery, allusion, metaphor and refrain.

TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A.

Students will compare the points of view contained in the poems, and discuss the poet's ability to evoke empathy. Students will compare the attitude of stoicism versus passionate defiance.

Activity 1. Students will read a variety of poems, answer questions following the readings, and discuss the issues raised.

"GIVE ME THREE GRAINS OF CORN, MOTHER."

"FIELDS OF ATHENRY"

"THE PRATIES GROW SO SMALL"

"THE ITINERANT SINGING GIRL"

"THE BOREEN SIDE"

"FAMINE AND EXPORTATION"

" DARK ROSALEEN"

"SONG OF THE FAMINE"

"THE FAMINE YEAR (THE STRICKEN LAND)"

Poetry used by permission of the Irish Academic Press, Dublin. Excerpted from The Hungry Voice, Edited by Chris Morash, 1989

GIVE ME THREE GRAINS OF CORN, MOTHER

By Amelia Blanford Edwards

Give me three grains of corn, Mother,
      Only three grains of corn;
It will keep the little life I have
      Till the coming of the morn.
I am dying of hunger and cold, Mother,
      Dying of hunger and cold;
And half the agony of such a death
      My lips have never told.

It has gnawed like a wolf at my heart, Mother,
      A wolf that is fierce for blood;
All the livelong day, and the night beside,
      Gnawing for lack of food.
I dreamed of bread in my sleep, Mother,
      And the sight was heaven to see;
I awoke with an eager, famishing lip,
   But you had no bread for me.

How could I look to you, Mother,
      How could I look to you
For bread to give to your starving boy,
      When you were starving too?
For I read the famine in your cheek,
      And in your eyes so wild,
And I felt it in your bony hand,
   As you laid it on your child.

The Queen has lands and gold, Mother,
      The Queen has lands and gold,
While you are forced to your empty breast
      A skeleton babe to hold-
A babe that is dying of want, Mother,
      As I am dying now,
With a ghastly look in its sunken eye,
      And famine upon its brow.

There is many a brave heart here, Mother,
      Dying of want and cold,
While only across the Channel, Mother,
      Are many that roll in gold;
There are rich and proud men there, Mother,
      With wondrous wealth to view,
And the bread they fling to their dogs tonight
      Would give life to me and you.

What has poor Ireland done, Mother,
    What has poor Ireland done,
That the world looks on, and sees us starve,
    Perishing one by one?
Do the men of England care not, Mother,
    The great men and the high,
For the suffering sons of Erin's Isle,
    Whether they live or die?

Come nearer to my side, Mother,
    Come nearer to my side,
And hold me fondly, as you held
    My father when he died;
Quick, for I cannot see you, Mother,
    My breath is almost gone;
Mother! Dear Mother! Ere I die,
    Give me three grains of corn.

FIELDS OF ATHENRY (SONG)

By Pete St. John

By a lonely prison wall, I heard a young girl calling
"Michael, they have taken you away,
For you stole Trevelyan's corn,
So the young might see the morn.
Now a prison snip lies waiting in the bay."

Low lie the fields of Athenry
Where once we watched the small free birds fly
Our love was on the wing
We had dreams and songs to sing
It's so lonely round the fields of Athenry.

By a lonely prison wall, I heard a young man calling
"Nothing matters, Mary, when you're free
Against the famine and the crown,
I rebelled they cut me down.
Now you must raise our child with dignity."

By a lonely harbor wall, we watched the last star fall
As the prison ship sailed out against the sky
For she lived to hope and pray for her love in Botany Bay
It's so lonely round the fields of Athenry.

THE PRATIES GROW SO SMALL

Anonymous

O, the praties they grow small
over here, over here.
O, the praties they grow small,
and they grow from spring to fall,
and we eat them skins and all,
over here, over here.

O, I wish that we were geese,
night and morn, night and morn,
O, I wish that we were geese,
For they fly and take their ease,
And they live and die in peace,
over here, over here.

O, we're trampled in the dust,
over here, over here,
O, we're trampled in the dust,
But the Lord in whom we trust,
will give us crumb for crust,
over here, over here.

THE ITINERANT SINGING GIRL

By Jane Francesca Wilde (Oscar Wilde's Mother)

Fatherless and motherless, no brothers have I,
And all my little sisters in the cold grave lie;
Wasted with hunger I saw them falling dead --
Lonely and bitter are the tears I shed.

Friendless and loverless, I wander to and fro,
Singing while my faint heart is breaking fast with woe,
Smiling in my sorrow, and singing for my bread --
Lonely and bitter are the tears I shed.

Harp clang and merry song by stranger's door and board,
None ask wherefore tremble my pale lips at each word;
None care why the color from my wan cheek has fled --
Lonely and bitter are the tears I shed.

Smiling and singing still, tho' hunger, want, and woe,
Freeze the young life-current in my veins as I go;
Begging for my living, yet wishing I were dead --
Lonely and bitter are the tears I shed.

THE BOREEN SIDE

By James Tighe

A stripling, the last of his race,
lies dead In a nook by the Boreen side;
The rivulet runs by his board and his bed,
Where he ate the green cresses and died.

The Lord of the plains where that stream wanders on, -
Oh! he loved not the Celtic race --
By a law of the land cast out fellow man,
And he feeds the fat ox in his place.

The hamlet he leveled, and issued commands,
Preventing all human relief,
And out by the ditches, the serfs of his lands,
Soon perished of hunger and grief.

He knew they should die -- as he ate and he drank
of the nourishing food and wine;
He heard of the death cries of the famish'd and lank
And fed were his dogs and his swine.

That Lord is a Christian! and prays the prayer,
'Our Father' -- the Father of all --
And he reads in the Book of wonderful care,
That marks when a sparrow may fall.

And there lies that youth on his damp cold bed,
And the cattle have stall and straw;
No kindred assemble to wail the lone dead -
They perished by landlord law.

He lies by the path where his forefathers trod -
The race of the generous deeds,
That sheltered the Poor for the honor of God,
And fed them with bread -- not weeds.

Unshrouded he lies by the trackless path,
And he died as his kindred died -
And vengeance Divine points the red bolt of wrath,
For that death by the Boreen side.

FAMINE AND EXPORTATION

By John O'Hagan

Take it from us, every grain,
We were made for you to drain;
Black starvation let us feel,
England must not want a meal!

When our rotting roots shall fail,
When the hunger pangs assail,
Ye'll have of Irish corn your fill --
We'll have grass and nettles still!

We are poor, and ye are rich;
Mind it not, were every ditch
Strewn in spring with famished corpses,
Take our oats to feed your horses!

Heaven, that tempers ill with good,
When it smote our wonted food,
Sent us bounteous growth of grain --
Sent to pauper slaves, in vain!

We but asked in deadly need:
'Ye that rule us! Let us feed
On the food that's ours' ~ behold!
Adder deaf and icy cold.

Were we Russians, thralls from birth,
In a time of winter dearth
Would a Russian despot see
From his land its produce flee?

Were we black Virginian slaves,
Bound and bruised with thongs and staves,
Avarice and selfish dread
Would not let us die unfed.

Were we, Saints of Heaven! were we
How we burn to think it -- FREE!
Not a grain should leave our shore,
Not for England's golden store.

They who hunger where it grew --
They whom Heaven had sent it to --
They who reared with sweat of brow --
They or *none* should have it now.

Lord that made us! What it is
To endure a lot like this!
Powerless in our worst distress,
Cramped by alien selfishness!

Not amongst our rulers all,
One true heart whereon to call;
Vainly still we turn to them
Who despoil us and contemn.

Forced to see them, day by day,
Snatch our sole resource away;
If returned a pittance be --
Alms, 'tis named, and *beggars,* we.

Lord! thy guiding wisdom grant,
Fearful counselor is WANT;
Burning thoughts will rise within,
Keep us pure from stain of sin!

But, at least, like trumpet blast,
Let it rouse us all at last;
Ye who cling to England's side!
Here and now, you see her tried.

DARK ROSALEEN

By Sister Anne Therese Dillen

I thirst beside the heather-laden bogs -
no samaritan for me;
no one here to see
that I shall die amidst the
plenty, in the field -
and that its yield
will sail to shores beyond the sea.

How can it be
that flocks of sheep can find their fill
while I lie empty and in pain?
or is it vain
to beg attention to my plight?

How can I fight
when I am listless, drained alone,
shrunken to the bone
while others eat what I have
grown in toil?

Woman of the soil -
I fade against a wall of human greed
and - sower of the seed -
I languish as it grows...

THE SONG OF THE FAMINE

By Anomymous

Want! want! want! Under the harvest moon;
Want! want! want! Thro' dark December's gloom;
To face the fasting day upon the frozen flags!
And fasting turn away to cower beneath a rag.

Food! food! food! Beware before you spurn,
Ere the cravings of the famishing to loathing madness turn;
For hunger is a fearful spell, And fearful work is done,
Where the key to many a reeking crime is the curse of living on !

For horrid instincts cleave unto the starving life,
And the crumbs they grudge from plenty's feast but lengthen out the strife -
But lengthen out the pest upon the fetid air,
Alike within the country hut and the city's crowded lair.

Home! home! home! A dreary, fireless hole -
A miry floor and a dripping roof, and a little straw -- its whole.
Only the ashes that smoulder not, their blaze was long ago,
And the empty space for kettle and pot where once they stood in a row!

Only the naked coffin of deal, and the little body within,
I cannot shut it out from my sight, so hunger-bitten and thin; -
I hear the small weak moan - the stare of the hungry eye,
Though my heart was full of a strange, strange joy the moment I saw it die.

I had food for it e'er yesterday, but the hard crust came too late -
It lay dry between the dying lips, and I loathed it -- yet I ate.
Three children lie by a cold stark corpse In a room that' s over head -
They have not strength to earn a meal,
Or sense to bury the dead!

And oh! but hunger's a cruel heart, I shudder at my own,
As I wake my child at a tearless wake, All lightless and alone!
I think of the grave that waits, and waits but the dawn of day,
And a wish is rife in my weary heart --I strive and strive, but it won't depart-
I cannot put it away.

Food! food! food! For the hopeless day's begun;
Thank God there's one the less to feed! I thank God it is my son!
And oh! the dirty winding sheet, and oh! the shallow grave!
Yet your mother envies you the same of all the alms they gave!

Death! death! death! In lane, and alley, and street,
Each hand is skinny that holds the bier, and totters each bearer's feet;
The livid faces mock their woe, and the eyes refuse a tear;
For Famine's gnawing every heart, and tramples on love and fear!

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Cold! cold! cold! In the snow, and frost, and sleet,
Cowering over a fireless hearth, or perishing in the street,
Under the country's hedge, On the cabin's miry floor,
In hunger, sickness, and nakedness, it's oh! God help the poor.

It's oh! if the wealthy knew a tithe of the bitter dole
That coils and coils round the bursting heart like a fiend, to tempt the soul!
Hunger, and thirst, and nakedness, sorrow, and sickness, and cold,
It's hard to bear when the blood is young, and hard when the blood is old.

Sick! sick! sick! With an aching, swimming brain,
And the fierceness of the fever-thirst, and the maddening famine pain.
On many a happy face to gaze as it passes by -
To turn from hard and pitiless hearts, and look up for leave to die.

Food! food! food! Through splendid street and square,
Food! food! food! Where is enough and to spare;
And ever so meager the dole that falls, What trembling fingers start,
The strongest snatch it from the weak, For hunger through walls of stone would break
   It's a devil in the heart!

Like an evil spirit, it haunts my dreams, through silent, fearful night,
Till I start awake from the hideous scenes, I cannot shut from my sight;
They glare on my burning lids, and thought, like a sleepless goul,
Rides wild upon my famine-fevered brain -- Food! ere at last it come in vain
   For the body and the soul!

THE FAMINE YEAR (THE STRICKEN LAND)

By Jane Francesca Wilde

Weary men, what reap ye? -- Golden corn for the stranger.
What sow ye? -- Human corpses that wait for the avenger.
Fainting forms, hunger-stricken, what see you in the offing?
Stately ships to bear our food away, amid the stranger's scoffing.
There's a proud array of soldiers -- what do they round your door?
They guard our masters' granaries from the thin hands of the poor.
Pale mothers, wherefore weeping -- Would to God that we were dead;
Our children swoon before us, and we cannot give them bread.

We are wretches, famished, scorned, human tools to build your
pride, But God will yet take vengeance for the souls for whom Christ died.
Now is your hour of pleasure -- bask ye in the world's caress;
But our whitening bones against ye will rise as witnesses,
From the cabins and the ditches, in their charred, uncoffin'd masses,
For the Angel of the Trumpet will know them as he passes.
A ghastly, spectral army, before the great God we'll stand,
And arraign ye as our murderers, the spoilers of our land.

Questions:

"GIVE ME THREE GRAINS OF CORN, MOTHER."

Because the child/poet knows his mother has no corn to give him, is his pleading senseless? Does that make the poem more effective?

Do you identify more with the mother or the child?

Does the last half of the poem oversimplify the Famine story, or is it the logical way a child would view the issue: plenty vs. scarcity?

"FIELDS OF ATHENRY"

How does the image of birds differ in this poem differ from the geese in "The Praties Grow so Small"?

Why does the poet call it "Trevelyan's corn"?

What can you gather about the destination of the prison ship: Botany Bay? Locate it in a world atlas, and try to learn more about the Irish who were sent there on prison ships.

"THE ITINERANT SINGING GIRL"

Why does the girl's way of earning a living worsen her sorrow?

"THE BOREEN SIDE"

The poet compares the starvation deaths of the evicted to the well being of the animals who replace them. How does he use it to support the implication that the landlord is not a Christian?

"FAMINE AND EXPORTATION"

Which stanza best summarizes the poet's chief argument?

" DARK ROSALEEN"

How does the tone of the poem differ from "The Boreen Side" and "Famine and Exportation".

Is the poem's tone similar to "The Praties Grow so Small"?

"SONG OF THE FAMINE"

Which trial seem more terrifying: the physical or the emotional?

What seems to happen to compassion when survival is at stake?

"THE FAMINE YEAR (THE STRICKEN LAND)"

How does the poem use questions and answers to lead us from the subject of exports to the plight of starving children?

Are those two themes carried out more effectively in "Famine and Exportation" and "Give me three grains of corn, Mother"?

Do you think the poet finds real solace in the hope of an ultimate judgment day?